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THE GOLDEN GUARDSMEN

by S. J. Byrne



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EDITORIAL

THE other day we were reading a book. Rarely do we do this, because we'd rather talk than listen. We're always spouting off in all directions, loudly and persistently. We don't know how many listen, or care what we say, but being a little egotist, we keep on orating and blowing and we think we're a pretty big shot. But in this book we found a description of a science fiction reader that we're going to quote. In all the years of our editing, we've rarely quoted anybody, thinking our own words such glittering gems that we need not introduce clods among pearls. However, this gentleman we are going to quote is a much bigger shot than we are, and what he says goes *bang* in a way we like. The gentleman is H. A. Overstreet, and the book we were reading is his new *The Mature Mind* (which we are reading because we have begun to realize how immature we really are!). Says Mr. Overstreet:

"The power of reason is the power to see logical implications: of similarity and difference, of cause and effect, of relationships in time and space, of quantity and quality, of the subjective and the objective, of importance and unimportance. The human mind has, as one of its most unique potentials, the capacity to see such logical implications. If it develops healthily from infancy through childhood, and on

into adulthood, this inborn capacity becomes a more and more adequately developed tool for use. But this growth toward mental maturity is not automatic. It may be checked by emotional roadblocks. The individual, for example, will not develop his powers of reason in all their fullness if, by so doing, he would be forced to relinquish a position of emotional dependence that has become indispensable to him. Neither will he develop such powers if, by so doing, he would be forced to see his own brand of prestige and success as a petty thing, his own ambition as a ruthless will to dominate others at whatever cost to their welfare. In such instances the individual does not reason; he rationalizes—thereby pretending to himself that he obeys the dictates of his mind when, in actuality, he obeys the dictates of his unconscious and of the unresolved emotional problems lodged in that unconscious. Anyone who threatens to expose his self-deception—to reveal him as he is, in all his irrationality—becomes, to his mind, an archenemy: a Socrates whose disturbing voice must be silenced.”

Mr. Overstreet, as an example of this latter type of person, speaks of Roger Bacon, and how he was persecuted because his insight threatened all the superstitions and beliefs and immature “engrams” that bolstered their status quo, which was simply this: philosophy

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Malcolm Smith

had become complete, and nothing more was to be learned. We are told that when Bacon made ready to perform a few experiments (why experiment when all was known!) before a small audience, all Oxford was in an uproar. It was believed that Satan was about to let loose, to intervene in science. Everywhere priests, monks, fellows, and students rushed about, their garments streaming in the wind, and everywhere rose the cry, "Down with the magician!" and this cry, "Down with the magician!" resounded from cell to cell and from hall to hall.

This instance given by Mr. Overstreet does more than report an event. It pictures the immaturity of most minds at the time when science was making its entry and developing its *method*. It shows those minds terrified by the unfamiliar, their prestige threatened; and in their fear they struck back in unreasoning rage.

Yet Roger Bacon did not fail. Science came into the world. But again, the immature took over the *results* of science, and the *method* was left to the few. The veriest fool can use the most brilliant results of scientific experiment. The criminal can use them in his moral immaturity and perversity. To pull the lever, to push the button, to turn the dial, to shift the gears—these acts require no mature knowledge, no sense of responsibility, no empathy (mental sharing of the hurts and sorrows of others) no

philosophic sense of the whole. Thus, while the inventions of science magnify the power of the immature no less than the power of the mature—and magnify it to a point where a few childish minds can destroy the world—the insight of science remains unrealized . . .

Except in one significant instance.

And there you have it, my friends, my science fiction readers! *You* are the significant instance!

It is impossible for an immature mind to realize the fact of science fiction, to appreciate the insight of science fiction. Thus, those who read it and understand it and make it a living part of their life are the *mature minds* of which Mr. Overstreet deplores the extreme shortage in our day and age. Science fiction readers are *mature* human beings. Whatever their physical age, they are psychologically adult. And we want to thank Mr. Overstreet for defining the science fiction reader in a manner far beyond anything our own bumbling efforts could have produced.

But now we want to apply that definition to a few personal remarks. Only from this particular editor can you get such personal remarks as this, and this in spite of the fact that he realizes that there are always the masses of immature minds ready to lash out at him. Were he confined to the ordinary medium, he would despair of uttering a single word through the knowledge that his audience

would be incapable, because of their immaturity, of understanding, and worse, would descend upon him in the fury of "knowledge royally enthroned in its traditionality."

Science fiction is the modern, the newest method of "communication" between mature minds. It is a new meaning of words, a new semantics, a new *philosophy expressed!* It is a challenge to the immature, an upsetting of their status quo, a threat to their emotional roadblocks invented by Freud and lifted bodily into Hubbardism. Yet, Hubbard was a science fiction writer, speaking to mature minds, and he adopted sound scientific *insight*; this insight he inserted into a semi-fictional form, and the result was dianetics. He was another Roger Bacon, giving voice in the halls of superstition. He was drowned in the resulting flood of immature rebellion. Most of dianetics will go back into Freudism where it originally came from, and most of all, will be developed by the new "Overstreetism", the science of maturity.

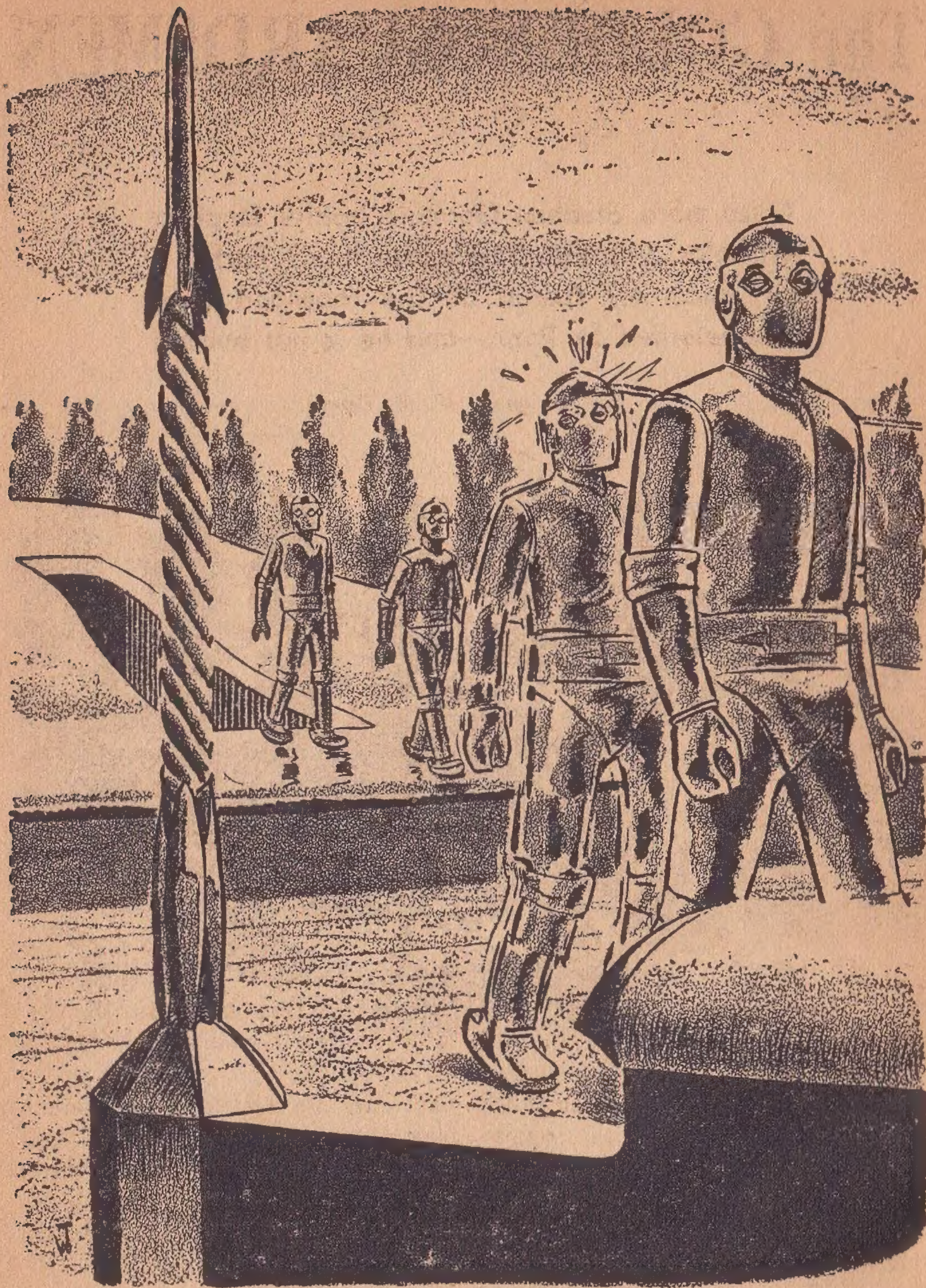
Thus, Hubbard was one of the adultisms of science fiction, and his will not be the last venture into the field of "Down with the magician!" Shaverism was a much more soundly based challenge to the immature. It took a mature mind indeed to sift through the now famous Mystery to the insight that it contained. It too, looming fearsomely in its weird challenge before the eyes of the "known is

already known and its truth unshakeable" type of immature mind, brought upon itself the unreasoning attack of the mind halted in its rightful course toward the wonderful power of *imagination* by a childhood experience that resulted in an unsurmountable roadblock to further use of imagination in the process of reasoning.

There are those "educated" persons who have even acquired degrees in science whose immature minds have made of their knowledge a deity of *facts to be revered*, and their idols are books. Such men as Hubbard and Shaver counsel these people to "burn their books" and the result is "sound scientific and completely devastating criticism". And having mouthed their "collection of facts" without the slightest recourse to reason sparked by imagination, they retire into their immaturity and roar in uncharitable laughter, demonstrating their complete lack of the mature processes of empathy.

In this editorial we are championing neither Hubbardism nor Shaverism. We are mentioning them only as examples of "challenges" to both mature and immature minds. Both should have been analyzed by the true processes of reason. Both, apparently, were, but only by the *science fiction reader!* Regard this! The rest of the world laughed and sneered and jeered. But the science fiction fan applied *reason*. He de-

(Continued on Page 137)

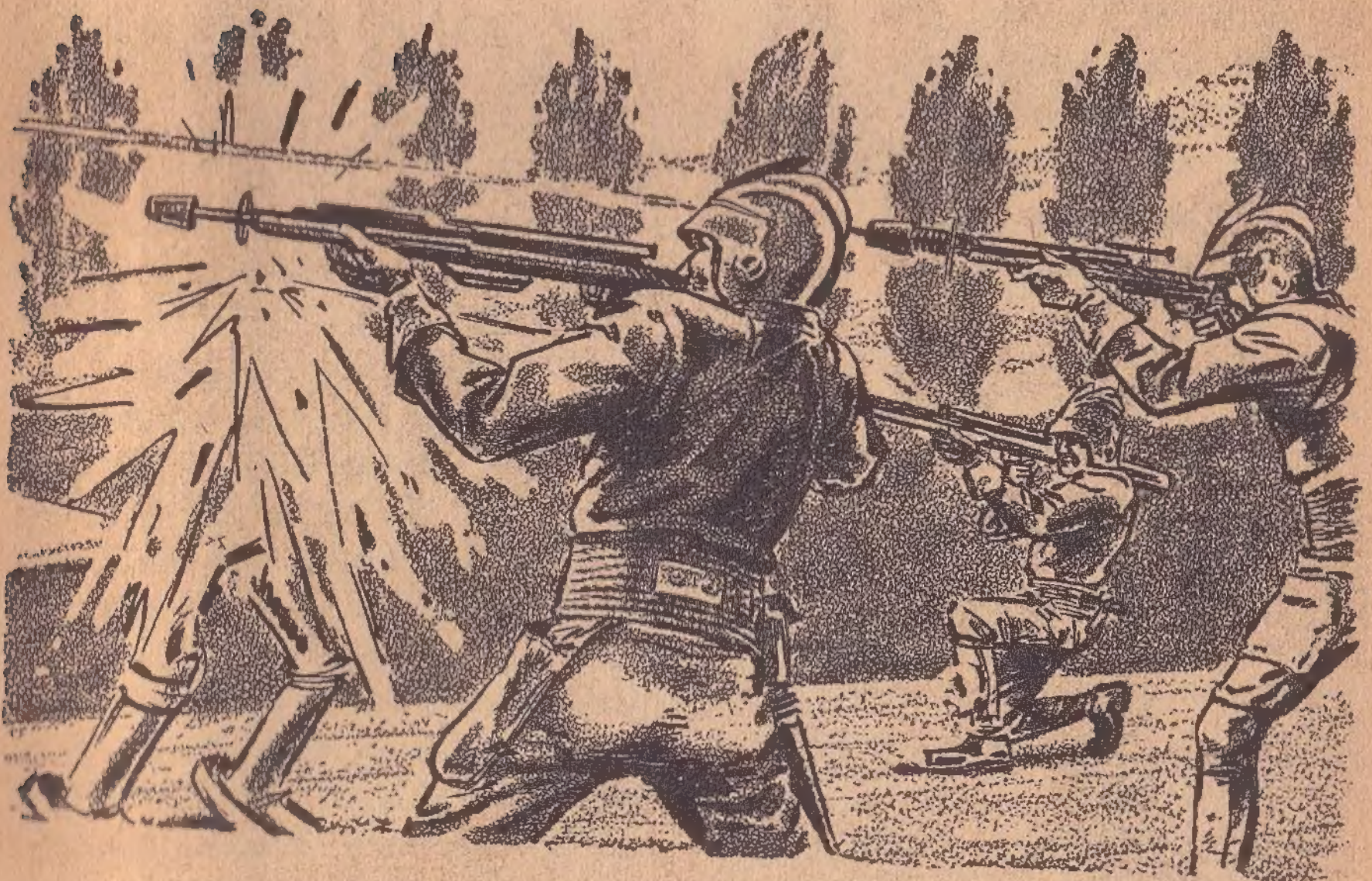


The GOLDEN GUARDSMEN

By S. J. Byrne

Once more Stephen Germain battles Emperor Nicholas, but this time more than Earth is at stake; for Izdran of The Thousand Lives has returned to Panh—and he is not human!

Illustration by W. E. Terry



TRINHA LLIH rubbed the crystal griddle with rouge cloth so fine that it polished it like a mirror. She used washing sand on her personal eating thorns and those of her father, Grlahn. Curiously, she tried his on over her

slim, dark fingers to see how much bigger a man's hands were than a young woman's. The hollow thorn talons slipped on all the way to the place between her fingers where her hand began.

"I could never eat with those!"

she said, half aloud. But of course she remembered that her father's fingers were chubby, like the rest of his grotesque little scuttling body.

It seemed to her that instead of using them for eating he should wear a *pair* of thorn talons when he took in bartered goods and sometimes silver in front of their trading booth, in exchange for *bhurra* liquor and *charnhrr* cheese and her own seed cakes, moss jelly and spider eggs, or for water, the most precious commodity in the world outside of *ca'ta*, which was dream manna from the sky, brought to them only by Izdran.

"I think father only lives for trading and haggling and chewing *ca'ta*," she mused. The thought made her look at her reflection in the crystal she had polished. Femininely, she tucked away at her long, black hair and surveyed her large, black eyes and pale red skin and high cheekbones. "When he comes to sell me he'll kill himself haggling. He'll try to get enough to retire by a crystal ridge and set up water farming."

With a little sigh of resignation, she threw some supper scraps into the hawk-beetle's cage, and the giant, golden-winged insect tore at the morsels as though it were on an assigned mission, killing some meat bearing creature of the great desert for its master, Grlahn. She checked the green, rustling *charnhraa* in their heated cave behind the booth to see how the aphid-like creatures

were for milk and if they had enough moss to eat.

"Oh I'll milk them early tomorrow," she said.

"Where are you going?" asked her chubby little father from his clinging net woven of the *krnar* spider's web.

"Just to get some air," she replied as she threw a web-woven shawl about her shoulders and slipped into crystal-soled sandals.

"Do not go far or I will look for you."

"No. Not far. Just a breath of air, father."

OUTSIDE the trading booth the whole camp lay sleeping under the brilliant starlight and the racing, silvery moons. The latter limned the crumbling pyramids of Druhdrui with silver, like an outline of reality given to ghosts after midnight. Most of the Gdjinhji tribesmen feared those ancient piles of mystery and took pains to erect their temporary huts well away from their sloping walls, but Trinha's father always scoffed at such superstition and dug right into the dunes at their bases to find greater protection from the cold, desert winds.

Trinha looked at the pyramids now, noting as she always had that they were in pairs, one large, one small. There were about ten pairs of the structures at Druhdrui, but she had seen as many as a hundred pairs at other trading camps along

the equator—like at Zridhn Nor. She wished she were there now, where the five greatest crystal ridges converged, bringing much more water, by osmosis, through their shining cells, from the shallow polar seas. Wherever there was better water farming the camps were more settled. There were more people, and a girl had a chance of being sold to a decent master rather than to the first, grinning ridge comber that wandered down out of the North with enough goods to make a successful bid—and enough *bhurra* on his breath to make romance fly to the sky like a wobbling djurnur pod.

As she climbed the nearest pyramid, she saw several djurnur pods break loose out of the desert and rise heavenward on the wind. Her mother used to tell her they were food for the ancient moon gods, but since her mother's death her father had insisted on the facts. The pods had something to do with replenishing the planet's water supply—something to do with a magical mixing of air in the high places, a drifting of all of them north and south, and of consequent snowstorms in the polar regions. She could not comprehend such miracles, but she remembered seeing the sky actually clouded over at times with the rising pods, and she used to dream that she was tiny enough to ride on one—up, up, into the freedom of the boundless heavens.

An inescapable restlessness assail-

ed Trinha, and she could not fathom it. Had she had her mother to confide in she might have been led to understand that this was the subtle chemistry of maturity. But she did not know this. Nor could she ask her father about it. He was a merchant—and she was of selling age.

So Trinha looked at the stars and wondered if they had something to do with it. The old story tellers claimed the ancients knew about the stars and their effect upon one's destiny.

Particularly Panh, that biggest one up there beyond the silvery moons—that blue-green eye of the night that always seemed to follow her wherever she went. Tonight she had Panh all to herself and she looked at it, wondering if it were made of fire, like the distant sun, or if—and this childish dream she concealed from everyone—if it were perhaps a world like her own, even a larger and better world, with oceans of water and green lands filled with shining cities and happy people.

Entranced by the magic of the moonlight and the sight of the silvery djurnur pods rising on the night wind above the desert, she recalled a beloved fairytale that her mother had told her when she was a child. An ordinary girl such as herself was born to poor parents, but none realized that she was actually Korla Na, a fairy princess. Just as she had arrived at the age when all girls were sold to the highest bidder and a very

ugly old man was about to purchase her, Mrähl Sahn, Prince of the Sky, appeared to her in a dream, telling her to eat of certain herbs which were ordinarily considered to be poison. Risking death rather than be the slave wife of the Ugly One, she arose from her sleeping net and obtained some of the herbs that same night. When she ate them, she grew smaller and acquired her true identity. As Korla Na, the fairy princess, she was able to ride on a djurnur pod up into the sky, where she entered the Kingdom of the Moon Gods and married Mrähl Sahn. The latter took her to his own special kingdom, which was Panh, the blue-green jewel that was the Guardian Star of the Twin Moons.

Somehow the story had remained ineradicably on the surface of her subconscious mind, emerging into consciousness, as it did now, in times of agitation, as though it were an escape mechanism for her restless spirit. She had believed, as a child, that the story would all come true, that Mrähl Sahn, the Sky Prince, would rescue her from the hopelessness of ordinary life.

As she stood there pondering on this, she was obsessed by a presentiment that something extraordinary was about to happen. And then she remembered. She remembered the purpose of her people in being here at Druhdrui at this time. In a few days the sky city of the Nrlani would materialize, and Izdran would bring

them the dream manna, *ca'ta*, in exchange for their usual supply of *grabdal*—the black, sticky stuff they extracted from the bubbling wells of Khandarna in the South. What *grabdal* really was, or why they used it, no one knew.

Nor did anyone dare to ask questions about the god-race. For Izdran of a Thousand Lives was omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. If too many questions were asked, the telepathic robots would come from below somewhere, out of the subterranean slave cities, and that would be the last anyone would ever see of the victim. What went on in those underground work camps no one ever lived to tell about . . .

SUDDENLY, Trinha saw something moving in the desert. Two human figures, approaching Druhdrui. Or *were* they human?

Her pulse began to race.

Could they be human if they were emerging from the desert? No one crossed the desert. Human travelers would follow the crystal ridges where water could be found. But these two had come directly out of the arid desert, braving its unknown terrors and its wild beasts of prey. The desert was the natural habitat of the deadly *krnar* spiders, larger than a man and capable of tearing him apart in a matter of minutes.

Only robots could—

With wildly beating heart, she wondered if her mind had asked

too many questions. Had Izdran found her out? Were these his emissaries from the slave cities, come to take her prisoner?

But no. These two were not robots. One of them, the larger one, was obviously ill. He constantly stumbled and fell, and the smaller, thinner one had to pick him up and help him along.

In the moonlight she could discern that they were not Gdjinhji. They were slightly taller and their skin was as white and pale as the moonlight. Their faces were thick with hair, and their ragged clothing was obviously strange in cut and texture. Moreover, the thin one carried some sort of weapon in his hand the like of which had never been seen before. It was tubular and metallic, glistening ominously in the moonlight.

Trinha gasped, as for a moment she had forgotten to breathe. The strangers were human, but they were not Gdjinhji. In her world there were only the Gdjinhji, the robots, and the Nrlani. No one had ever seen one of the Nrlani race, but surely the god-people who ruled them would not come stumbling out of the desert like this! They would materialize out of the sky, riding high within the towering walls of their majestic city.

Therefore, by a simple process of elimination, these two were from another world. And that world would be Panh, if any.

Trinha wanted to believe in this miracle. However, there was something strong and purposeful about that slender one that drew her to him. She remembered her fairytale. Her prince had come, to take her to Panh, to the blue-green world in the sky that was filled with oceans and green-clad countryside and shining cities and happy people.

Rejecting thoughts of possible danger to herself, Trinhã ran down the pyramid to greet the strangers...

THEY saw her coming toward them. The big man fell down and lay in the sand, mumbling as though in a fevered delirium. The other one stood there, straight and tall, with chin up and shoulders back and his strange weapon lying idly in the crook of his arm.

As she reached their immediate vicinity she saw that the thin one was somewhat older than she had imagined, but he was none the less attractive, despite the unruly growth of beard that covered the lower portion of his aquiline face. It was the strength of his personality that drew her to him. The males of her own race were dulled and weakened by the universal male habit of chewing *ca'ta*. This was the first time that she had ever looked into such an alert pair of eyes—ice-gray eyes that seemed to cut through her like a knife.

"Is this Druhdrui?" he asked her.

She was amazed to hear him struggle with the words, as though speaking in a language that was foreign to him!

"Yes," was all she could answer, for staring at him. She also examined the other one more closely. He was fat but powerfully built, his face huge and round. His eyebrows were bushy, with a large wart between them. She had never seen a wart before and it frightened her. The robots had three eyes, the center one being telepathic-hypnotic. Could these be robots in disguise, after all?

She trembled, wondering at her own rashness.

"What do you want?" she asked the slender one. "You—you came across the desert."

"Is not Druhdrui the place where the Nrlani will soon appear?" he interrogated.

"The Nrlani!" Her hand went to her mouth and she drew back a step. "What would you with the Nrlani?"

"I seek them."

She stared at his firm, thin face, incredulously. He did not look insane.

"No one *seeks* the Nrlani!" she gasped.

"But *I* do," insisted the stranger, with overwhelming self-assurance. "And you have not answered my question."

"They—they will come," she answered.

"When?" The question was hissed

between his white teeth, his eyes flashing a command for her to answer, his face lined with the signs of struggle between burning hope and anxiety.

"In a day or so. But who—"

The slender one swayed and reached out his hand for support. He would have fallen had she not helped him to stand. A tingling thrill ran through her as she felt his hand on her arm. It was firm, and very warm.

"I have sought them for over a year," he said. "At last—the goal is at hand! Take us into your camp. We are weak with hunger and thirst."

"Tell me," she said, trying to meet his eyes with hers. "Are you Mrahl Sahn, Prince of the Sky? Have you come to take me back with you—to Panh?"

The stranger stiffened, regained his balance, and stared at her.

"What made you say that?"

"If you are not from Panh, then you are from the slave cities," she persisted.

"We have visited several of the slave cities," he replied. "But the robots let us go."

"Then—" Her eyes widened. "You *are* from Panh! None of our people have ever returned from the slave cities!"

The stranger hesitated, still watching her curiously. The big man on the ground emitted a groan. "*Sukin syn!*" he exclaimed, in a strange

tongue. And he went on as though cursing and pleading for help at the same time.

"Run for help," said the thin one. "I can drag my companion no farther . . ."

THAT night, Druhdru relighted its campfires and the whole market came to life, all because of the crazy strangers out of the desert. Much to Trinha's surprise, she had little difficulty in influencing her father to take them in. Soon, however, she saw that it was not the milk of human kindness that had asserted itself. What was immediately perceived by Grlahn was that his two guests stimulated business beyond his wildest hopes.

It did not matter who the pale-faced imbeciles were, he told Trinha. If he and she fed them and tended the sick one and kept them both warm, they would stay in his booth. And as long as they stayed, his fellow tribesmen would congregate under his improvised roof and he would the more quickly barter his wares and fill his leather cases with more barterable goods for the coming season at Zridhn Nor.

Everyone wanted to see the madmen and hear their strange speech and learn of their insane desire to contact the Nrlani, to hear the thin one's tales concerning the slave cities and to watch the fat one rave and cry in his sickness and cling to his companion as though he were his

mother. The two were a very lucrative attraction.

It was Singh, especially, who laughed at them and said they were idiots and colorless freaks who would make a good sideshow. Singh was Grlahn's chief competitor at Druhdru and he was jealous of all this midnight business concentrated in one trading booth. Much *bhurra* liquor and *charnhr* was being sold, and the crowd was beginning to get hungry and buy seed cakes and moss jelly.

Singh was a big, powerful, unprincipled cut-throat, and those who knew him were just as pleased to trade with Grlahn, who was lazy and fat and greedy, but not so dangerous. And he was reasonably honest, whereas Singh would cheat and challenge the victim to prove it. Realizing the general attitude of the camp, and secretly resenting the strangers, Singh had enlisted the support of three of his cronies, who carried five-pronged *baclai* hooks, with which a man's flesh could be torn from him. They were determined to make trouble.

What really set Singh off was the attitude of the lean, suspicious looking stranger with the ice-gray eyes and the mysterious weapon. Through all the shouting of insults he had sat calmly on one of Grlahn's leather cases and questioned various customers without paying the slightest attention to Singh. He acted, as Singh loudly pointed out, like the Overlord Chief of all the Gdjinhji.

"Who are you," he challenged, "to take on the airs of a great chieftain and question us? We are the ones who should be questioning you! Whence come you?"

Other tribesmen moved aside to give him room. They saw that he and his companions carried *baclai* hooks, and they tensed, waiting.

Grlahn rushed to the scene, his belly quivering with anxiety.

"Now Singh!" he pleaded. "Let us be fair! Don't make trouble again like you did last year, just because I place my booth against the pyramid walls and you do not. I told you that's the best way to bring in trade, because it's a better protection from the wind."

"You speak words of sand," scoffed Singh. "You have business because you feed these strangers who do not belong here. You keep out of this, Grlahn. I speak in the interests of our people!"

With this, he walked directly over to the thin stranger and faced him. The onlookers did not envy the stranger, because they feared Singh. He was strong, quick to fight, quick to kill.

But the thin one from the desert only glared back at Singh without moving. And he answered, saying, "You claim we do not belong here. That is true. Nor is it our desire to be here. We have come to this place seeking the Nrlani, who may be the only ones who can help us to return whence we came."

Singh threw back his head and laughed, and his broken teeth, though stained blue by *ca'ta*, glimmered in the firelight. "How big this insect talks! Izdran would cook you for supper!"

At this there was a titter of sympathetic laughter in the crowd, and that was enough to set the stranger off. He stood up, not swiftly, but with cold dignity and practised disdain.

"It is time I told you the facts," he said, gazing momentarily at Trinha, who watched him adoringly. "Look, all of you, at that great star that rides the sky between the inner and the outer moon. You call it Panh, do you not?"

Heads swung about, including Singh's, and they all looked up at bright, blue green Panh, shining in that portion of the clear night sky which was visible from under Grlahn's improvised roof. Trinha's heart beat so hard now that she thought everybody would hear it.

"That is another world, a larger world than this, a world of continents and oceans and lofty mountains and forests and rivers, teeming with thousands of millions of inhabitants. There they live in tremendous cities and travel in ships that fly through the sky like the Nrlani. That is our world, which we call *Earth*. In fact, I was its ruler."

A HUNDRED widened eyes stared. Grlahn stopped waiting on customers. Trinha stopped serving

bhurra liquor. Everybody stared at at the thin one.

But then Singh laughed again. "The insane have large imaginations!" he said. "You are a raving lunatic!"

In that moment, the thin one struck Singh in the face with the back of his hand, not challengingly, but contemptuously, as a slave-master might punish an unruly servant. The crowd gasped, drawing back to clear a space for battle, which was certain to ensue. Grlahn popped his more fragile wares miraculously out of sight.

Singh and his men did not wait for any more encouragement. They closed in on the stranger, brandishing their murderous *baclai* hooks.

Trinha screamed. "No, Singh! Don't do it!"

It was then, however, that they learned that the stranger was definitely not of their world, that he came from a greater one, with muscles equipped to react to greater forces of gravitation. With a quick sweep of the butt end of his weapon, he knocked Singh off his feet and broke his arm. With a kick of his booted foot he sent another of his attackers reeling. Trinha drew back into her father's trembling arms, simultaneously amazed, frightened and thrilled.

The remaining two attackers hesitated. Whereupon the stranger threatened them with the back of his hand, contemptuously. Then one

of the attackers sprang upon him, determined to tear him down.

But the stranger seemed made of a different flesh than they. Fatigued as he was, he managed to lift his assailant into the air and throw him away.

The last attacker turned on his heels and ran shouting an alarm to the rest of the camp.

Writhing in pain on the ground, Singh cried out a warning. "They are robots in disguise!" he yelled. "They are made of metal! They are from the slave cities, come to trap us!"

But the thin one had been grazed by a *baclai* hook, and he was bleeding.

"Do robots bleed?" he asked. "I tell you I am from Panh, and I want to return to it. But there is more that I want from the Nrlani than that. I have come among you to warn you that Panh is now in the hands of one who would destroy you. He is perhaps even greater than Izdran of a Thousand Lives. Even now he is preparing thousands of men to come here and subjugate all of you to his rule. And it is him I would conquer. Once I ruled that world, and he took it from me, not because his forces were merely stronger, but because he was not of my kind, just as I am not of yours.

"You could not know the meaning of the word, 'mutant,' but that is what this ruler of Panh is, and

as such he is to be feared. Just as the name of Izdran terrorizes you now, one day it could happen that the name of Stephen Germain will terrorize you more!"

"*Germain!*" shrieked the sick stranger on the ground. His eyes widened and his oily face became distorted with an expression of fear and hate. He sat up, panting with the effort. "Where is he? Don't let him find me like this! He'll kill us both on sight!"

Inasmuch as the sick one spoke in a language which had never been heard before they could understand nothing except the name, *Germain*.

"You see?" said the thin one. "I speak the name of Panh's present ruler and my companion cringes, just as all of you will unless you cooperate with me in my future plans to take Panh away from him and rule it again, in my own way."

TO Trinha, the impossible dream had come true. Panh was a greater world, full of oceans, cities and people. And the stranger was actually a prince—a ruler! Now she felt in her heart of hearts that the denouement of the dream could be taken for granted. He would buy her and take her to Panh.

"Trinha!" shouted Grlahn. "You are pouring *bhurra* all over Krah-larg's eggs!"

She stopped to look into the startled customer's face. Then she laughed. What did it matter? Her

dream was coming true!

Many of the tribesmen were now impressed, but none of them knew that it was this same Nicholas the First of New Russia who had ruled the Earth with an iron hand, enjoying a greater might and power than Hitler or Napoleon or Genghis Khan. He had marched ruthlessly to an unprecedented pinnacle of fame and power across the broken bodies of millions of his victims, waving his hands magically and causing empires to tremble and fall, sealing the destinies of presidents and kings.

But he had met with defeat in the midst of victory, and fate had cast him adrift on an alien planet where he was certain no Earthman had walked before. He was alone, forgotten, his pride and glory and power buried up there in the heavens beyond his reach, with no one to recognize him for what he had been. No one, that is, except Pavlovich, an ex-major in one of his many armies. No one to share his frustration except Pavlovich. Pavlovich knew the whole, involved story. He needed Pavlovich.

But Pavlovich was in delirium half the time, and part of his mentality had been impaired by the fevers he had suffered. Nicholas had grown lately to fear that he would end up with nothing but a madman to keep him company, and so his desperation to find a cure for the other had increased proportionately.

Then, too, there was something

else, much more important. Their mutual bond, which was their equal hatred of Stephen Germain. Bitter it was for Nicholas to realize that it was he, himself, who enabled his greatest surgeon, Dr. Julius Borg, to use the captured American spy and former, Red-baiting journalist, as a guinea pig, which had resulted in his becoming a surgical mutant who rose up to defeat his greatest purpose on Earth. Germain was master of that planet now.

His purpose in creating Germain, the mutant, was to use his mind, to discover a means of overcoming gravitation. Germain, under an ever waning hypnotic control by Borg, had no sooner presented him with the secret he sought than he forced Nicholas to make use of it in order to escape with his life. Even out in space he had been pursued, but he had managed to make a crash landing in an auxiliary flier, on Mars, after his main ship had been destroyed by remotely controlled atomic rockets. The fact that he had escaped with his life he was sure Germain did not know.

Germain did not know that he, Nicholas I, and his lesser enemy, Pavlovich, still lived, or that they had both sworn to return and wipe him out. At first, in the face of his hopeless isolation, Nicholas had felt it was futile to harbor such a dream. Yet Pavlovich's personal hatred of their common enemy had sustained him. He had begun to feel instinc-

tively that he and his companion might yet find a way.

Nor was it all instinct. At first disillusioned by the primitive calibre of the human type Martian inhabitants, who looked exactly like a Western Hemisphere brand of Indians, he had become intrigued by his later discovery of the underground industrial slave cities and the telepathic robots.

These latter seemed to be the instruments of another kind of intelligent life on the planet. And as his knowledge of the Martian tongue had increased, he had learned that there was, in fact, a concealed master race somewhere, to whom the natives, whether enslaved or free, referred as gods. But Nicholas suspected from the first that these so-called gods were far from being supernatural. He was sure they were living, material entities.

The primitive Gdjinhji tribesmen referred to their feared and very mysterious overlords as the Nhlani, and there was much subdued talk of one entity in particular—Izdran of a Thousand Lives. No matter how many questions he had asked during his long sojourn on Mars, he had only been able to glean the repeated information that Izdran was "indescribable, unapproachable, invincible, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent," that he was the undisputed lord of the planet and a creature or being of very great "magical" attainment.

Where could Izdran or at least some of the mysterious Nrlani be found? Once in a Martian year they showed up at a place called Druh-drui. That had been his goal, Druh-drui and a meeting with the dreaded Nrani. If they were beings of a superior intelligence, which was strongly evidenced by their incredible robot policemen, then they were equipped with the tools of science and industry, and he had to find them. They might be his means of returning to Earth. Without that possibility to sustain him he knew he would die. So he lived for it, and he made Pavlovich live for it when he should have been dead.

JUST as Nicholas summoned Trinha to attend to Singh, something began to happen outside. Like the howling of a distant storm, voices began to rise in a single, fearful shout. There was a sound of hundreds of running feet. Panic had struck Druhdrui.

He stepped outside among the Gdjinhji. "What is it?" he asked of them.

Some of them joined the panic-stricken crowd that was running through the camp, while others fell on their knees and bowed their heads, trembling.

"*Izdran!*" came the cry of the mob. "Izdran is here! He walks alone!"

"Let me out of here!" shouted Singh, getting painfully to his feet.

"I told you these strangers were instruments of the Nrlani! If Izdran walks alone, he comes for no good. We are trapped!"

Grlahn instinctively started to pack all his belongings. Trinha, however, came to Nicholas and clutched his arm.

"Save us!" she cried. "We have been kind to you, Prince! Do not let us be taken into the slave cities!"

Nicholas raised his rifle and fired a thunderous shot into the air. It stopped everyone dead in their tracks.

"Stay where you are!" he shouted. "If Izdran is here, he has come to see *me!* Where is he?"

The tribesmen cowered, not knowing which fear to obey. But one of them offered an explanation. He came to Nicholas, kneeling, and pointed to the adjacent pyramid.

"He is there!" he said. "He has emerged from the pyramid! There he is now! In truth, he seeks you out! Save us!"

Nicholas looked—and received a shock of surprise.

Pavlovich struggled to his feet and screamed. "It's Germain! Shoot him! Shoot him!"

"Shut up, idiot!" Nicholas snapped at him. "It's nothing but a Martian *krnar*." He pointed his rifle at it as it approached him.

The eight foot, semi-translucent spider was a murderous killer, a dreaded denizen of the desert. It raced directly toward him. He stood

his ground, knowing that a single shot could bring it down. But he only had twelve precious rounds left. He hoped that the mere threat of the weapon would bring it to a halt in time.

"I don't understand," he said to the girl at his elbow. "Why do they think this is Izdran?"

"Izdran is everywhere," she said, trembling visibly, "and he lives in a thousand forms! He has been known to visit us before in this form, always with dire consequences for someone. An ordinary *krnar* would shun this camp. No, my Prince, it is Izdran, himself, who seeks you this night! Beware!" She made a peculiar sign on her forehead, tracing the outlines of a pyramid with her thumb, then a square, representing the base of a pyramid. And she looked at him guiltily, because by modern Martian standards she was indulging in paganism, equivalent to blackmagic. He realized it must have been abject fear that led her to revert to the signs of the ancient Moon Worshipers who had built the pyramids.

"This is superstitious nonsense!" he snorted. "That's just a lost and bewildered *krnar*, or else it's insane with hunger."

The spider beast came to a stop in front of him, with obvious deliberation. Those tribesmen who remained in camp stood still, watching breathlessly. They watched the stranger from Panh with his fright-

ening weapon, and they watched the terrible materialization of their dictator god, and the only sound in all Druhdrui was that of the wind howling among the ghostly pyramids.

"Why doesn't it do something?" Pavlovich whispered hoarsely between clenched teeth and white, parched lips.

"Maybe it will go away," muttered Nicholas, glowering along his sights.

"*Who are you?*" came a strange, distant sounding voice. "*You are obviously not of this world,*" it commented coldly.

Pavlovich panted audibly. Beads of perspiration made his forehead glisten in the sickly light of the campfire. He said nothing because he reasoned this was just another case of the D.T.'s, in which Nicholas would not be interested just now. He made a desperate attempt to hold onto himself, to convince himself that the *krnar* had not spoken. Then, to his great surprise, Nicholas answered the spider beast's question.

"We are men of Panh," he said, testily, still holding his rifle well aimed. "The question is, who are you? I'll tell you right now you're no *krnar*. Please understand you are not dealing with a superstitious Martian native. I am aware of the possibility of transmitted sensory impression and inducted illusion. You are using the beast as a disguise,

and only the Nrlani could do that. Come out of hiding or I'll shoot!"

"I *am* Izdran," came the answer. "You are not at all superstitious. In fact, you give promise of even being intelligent. What do you want?"

Nicholas thought swiftly. He was aware now that he was dealing with a superior intelligence, and with such it was practical to avoid sophistries and come to the point. "I need your help," he said, frankly. "To purchase your aid, I offer a proposition. I want to bargain with you. But first, come out of hiding."

The *krnar* stood there motionlessly, glistening eerily in the light of the two small moons spinning on high.

"I stand before you," said Izdran.

"You do not!" retorted Nicholas, swiftly. "This proves you lie!" Whereupon, he shot the *krnar* and it fell dead.

Pavlovich yelled above the shouting and screaming of the Gdjinhji. "There's another one!"

"I am Izdran," said the second beast, which had just emerged out of the surrounding darkness. "With what would you bargain? You seem to have nothing to offer?"

"I offer you—half a world," said Nicholas, "if you will assist me."

"Half of what world—Panh?"

"Yes."

"And the other half?"

"Is mine."

"You speak in the present tense.

Either you mean *was* or *shall be*."

"Both," replied Nicholas.

"You were once one of the rulers of Panh?"

"I was its supreme ruler."

"Until what forces dethroned you?"

"Forces which you can help me to overcome."

"How do you know I can help you?"

"You obviously possess the knowledge and the tools of an advanced science. That's all I need, plus a little cooperation and strategy."

"But Panh is highly populated. How do you know I could supply a sufficient army? Furthermore, what makes you think I would covet that world?"

"The answer to your first question is this. On Panh are untold millions who would still serve me. They can be recontacted and reorganized. The answer to your second question is that you live on a dying planet which offers you nothing. If you are equipped with an advanced science and have not coveted Panh you are less intelligent than I have surmised."

There followed a lull in the conversation during which Nicholas thought he detected an echo of amused laughter. Then the spider beast said, "Who is your companion?"

"He is my aide. He is stricken with the desert fever and I need help. I want to make him well."

"Why?"

"He can be of great assistance to both of us, but I'm not going to go into the details of that under these circumstances!" snapped Nicholas, impatiently. "Now come out of your disguise and take us to where you really are! We're exhausted! I've spent months groping through Hell to find you, so let's have an end to this nonsense!" He had to use his own language to express the word, "Hell," as there was no word for it in the Gdjinhji vocabulary, but his questioner appeared to understand perfectly well what he meant.

"What of the means of transportation back to Panh?" persisted Izdran. "Have you a space ship? I don't see how you could, since a hundred of your years ago your kind was merely playing around with the idea of a horseless carriage."

Nicholas was secretly exultant. Then these Nrlani did actually have intimate knowledge of Earth! "Only a wrecked commuter vessel," he replied to the other's question. "It could be repaired. My main ship was destroyed out in the asteroid belt."

"Destroyed? By what?"

"By remotely controlled atomic bombs."

"Whose atomic bombs? Who destroyed you?" There was a rising note of concern in the other's voice. "Surely your world could not have achieved nuclear fission so soon, and

if the bombs were not from your world, then—"

"You ask too many questions!" shouted Nicholas. "Get that stinking *krnar* out of my sight and let's get together or I won't talk any further!"

"You are not giving the orders here!" came the other's voice preemptorily. "You are fortunate to be alive at all! Why do you suppose the robots permitted you to keep that absurd weapon of yours at all this time? Because I knew you'd need it to survive!"

For answer, Nicholas fired his rifle and killed the second *krnar*. Then he got to his feet and shouted into the night. "I said come out from hiding, damn you!"

But there was only silence, save for the wind among the pyramids. The stars and Panh looked apathetically down as if nothing had ever happened.

Pavlovich grasped Nicholas wildly by the throat. "You had a chance to get us out of this!" he shouted, in Russian. "You spoiled it for us! Now the voice won't come back!"

Nicholas brought the butt end of his rifle up sharply under his companion's chin, and the latter slumped to the ground. He stared resolutely above the heads of the Gdjinhji, into the Martian night. He knew that Izdran was not dead—not Izdran of a Thousand Lives. He knew he would return, for he had succeeded in tossing him the bait . . .

GRADUALLY, the Gdjinhji were coming back into camp. Grlahn, who had not been able to flee because he could not lift the bundle of valuables he had scraped together, returned mercurially to the business of waiting on trade. He was incapable of expressing his gratitude to Nicholas for having rescued them all from a fate worse than death. Moreover, he was honored, and his little ego was intensely inflated with his good luck. He was host to a mighty chieftain, after all. His guest had been and perhaps would be again someday, chieftain of all Panh!

As Grlahn watched Nicholas and saw that his sharp eyes rested not infrequently on Trinha, he had a sudden inspiration. It would be infinitely profitable for him to befriend such a man.

"You are deserving of the greatest gift I am capable of giving you, Sire!" he exclaimed in a loud voice that was recognized by his customers as a public announcement.

Nicholas turned to him, as did Trinha, her face flushed with pride and excitement.

"I give you—my daughter, Trinha Llih—gratis, as an expression of my enduring friendship!"

The crowd roared instant approval and congratulations. Trinha's eyes widened with surprise, incredulity—and embarrassment, because she knew her secret exultation was making her blush crimson. She looked at Nicholas' inscrutable face, then

shrank away to hide from the leering, shouting crowd of Gdjinhji. Yet every fibre of her being was a little super-sensitive ear that listened for the words of acceptance she knew her Prince would say. She knew he would accept, because it was a predetermined part of her life's dream.

Nicholas turned to look at her again. She was seated on a mat beside one of Grlahn's bales of merchandise, hiding her face in her arms, her raven black hair glistening down her back. Without her web-shawl she was a healthy vision of young femininity, and Nicholas reflected that her soft, freshly matured figure might have competed with that of any woman he had ever known. She was, by Earth standards, sixteen years old, more or less. Her complexion was light, only slightly tinged with the reddish hue of her kind, her teeth were strong and white, her brown eyes large and innocent, and her raven black hair—

That hair! For one fleeting moment it brought to his mind the vision of another woman with hair like that, but her skin was white and her eyes were blue. She lived up there in the sky, on Earth. She had been his prisoner once, back there in the old victorious days of expansion. There would never be another woman like her, and his dreams of conquest would be without basis for evaluation unless he could possess her. The only trouble was—her name was Lillian Germain.

She was the wife of his deadly enemy, Stephen Germain, mutant master of a world that had once been his.

As Grlahn cleared his throat, expectantly, and as Trinha raised her head to look at him, he managed to smile, but his eyes narrowed.

"You are very generous," he said, non-committally. He was aware of the rigid social laws of the Gdjinhji, and he understood that when a man offered his own daughter in exchange for actual or imagined favors it would be an insult to refuse.

Taking his reply as an acceptance, the assembled Gdjinhji tribesmen followed native custom. As Grlahn had already filled their cups, they raised them in silent toast. Then they left, taking Grlahn with them.

Pavlovich, who had regained consciousness, rubbed his bruised jaw and belched.

Knowing what was expected of him, Nicholas approached Trinha and grasped her hair. The quick motion drew her head back and she looked up at him adoringly. She was not unattractive to him. Her lips were full, waiting for his own. Deliberately, she made a curious hunching motion that dropped her cloak-like garment to her waist. Her deep, young breasts rose and fell visibly with her agitated breathing.

He pulled her roughly to her feet, as was expected, crushed her to him in swift response. But he did not kiss her. Instead, he looked pene-

tratingly into her eyes.

"If you would serve me," he said, "you will do as I command."

With half-closed eyes, Trinha was ecstatically obedient. "Tell me, Sire!" she exclaimed.

"You understand the nature of the desert fever, do you not?"

Her eyes opened and he felt her tense as she stared at him. "Yes," she answered. "But—"

"Then you know one of the methods of breaking it," he persisted.

As she followed his gaze to Pavlovich, who lay on a floor mat watching them in a dull stupor, she recoiled.

"But Prince! I — you can't mean—!"

His ice-gray eyes blazed in command. "You will serve me!" he said. "For reasons which I cannot explain, you cannot be mine. But you *can* be his!"

For answer, Trinha collapsed to the ground, sobbing audibly. Nicholas watched her for a moment, then poured himself a cup of *bhurra* liquor. Pavlovich began to focus his fever-reddened eyes on Trinha.

It would have fanned Nicholas' ego to be the first Earthman to take a Martian woman, but there was one woman alone, among literally thousands he had known as First Czar of New Russia, who could ever mean anything to him, and she was on Earth. His abstinence in preference to her was a better pabulum for his ego, not because of idealism, of

which he had none, but because of this demonstration of his superior will. When he could throw ripe plums like Trinha before his underlings, he was superior and deserving of the cream of the crop. Then, too, recapturing Lillian Germain would be the sweeter revenge.

IT was a long night for Nicholas. Fatigued as he was, the tremendous possibilities connected with his contact with Izdran kept him awake. The food and drink he had taken in gave him energy, and his keen mind denied the demands of his body for sleep. It was like the old campaign days when he was expanding his power over the Earth. His heart beat now in cadence with the distant drums of conquest.

He had striven long and mightily for a meeting with the mysterious Nrlani race, and now he felt that his goal was imminent. He tried to sleep but could not. Nor was he envious of Pavlovich's deep, guttural snores, nor of the slender shape that lay beside him. His thoughts were many, varied, and cunning. They had to be. He knew he was going to have to match wits with superior beings, and he was comforted only by the thought that the jackal had sometimes been known to outwit the lion.

He left the camp sometime in the dark hours preceding the dawn and climbed the nearest pyramid. He wanted to be on the top at sunrise

and look out over the flat Martian landscape as far as he could.

Beneath the hard surface of his conscious deliberations a vague curiosity assailed him. About these pyramids. Strange that there should have been pyramid builders in ancient times both on Earth and on Mars. The only difference here was that a large pyramid was always accompanied by a smaller one. What the significance of it was he could not guess, unless he could allow himself to infer that the ancient moon-worshippers who had built them were cognizant of the relative sizes of the two Martian moons and had represented the difference accordingly in their pyramids. But there were more important things on his mind just now. Later he might permit archaeologists to come here and figure it out. The living present was mystery enough. Yesterday could wait in its dust of ages for yet a little time.

He reached the top while it was still dark. Both moons had gone below the horizon, and only starlight and faint Earthlight limned a million tube-bark and djurnur bushes out on the desert with a ghostly fluorescence. Stars so numerous that they coalesced into celestial lakes of fire formed a mighty wall, as though protecting him from an intolerable nothingness that might otherwise have sucked his flesh dry of entity.

As if to form one of the poles of this far-flung Infinity, the green eye

of Earth gazed at him from a point slightly above the horizon, and its light was reflected in his gray eyes like the reviving embers of the negative greatness that had once flamed there—mercilessly.

Suddenly, as he stood there with the cold night winds of the Martian equator chilling his body and the faint, musty odor of the tube-bark blossoms in his nostrils, he thought he was having hallucinations. It seemed to him that a half dozen djurnur pods had gone into formation and were power-diving in his direction. Six silvery globes descended swiftly in his direction, out of the glittering heavens.

He tensed with indefinable alarm as he noted the deliberation with which they approached him. What were they? Space ships of the Nrl-ani?

When they swooped past him so closely that he could hear the whistling of the air due to their passage, he knew that they were not globular space vessels, nor were they djurnur pods. They were approximately three feet in diameter, and as they passed him they turned on their edges and revealed disc-like silhouettes.

Then, as they turned upward into the sky again, they grew miraculously in size even as they receded from him. And as they grew they became transparent, suddenly attenuating into invisibility!

He knew what they were. He had heard often of their appearance in

terrestrial skies. He had observed them in interplanetary space. They were "flying saucers." But the terrestrial name was inadequate. They were much more than that. Flying effortlessly in an atmosphere or in outer space, defying the laws of gravity and inertia alike, attenuating or densifying at will, they were to Nicholas a consuming mystery and a challenge to science.

Because they were *not* ships. *They were living creatures.* Denizens of the void. Even as these passed him he had observed the pulsating, slightly luminous nerve centers in the middle of each. How they lived, whence they came, or what the purpose of their existence was he could not begin to conjecture. Yet he knew these six were aware of him, that they would probably appear again.

He did not have long to wait. This time they were more densified than before. They were only one foot in diameter. But they hovered directly over his head now.

And suddenly a voice came to life inside his mind, just as it had once when Stephen Germain had spoken to him telepathically. He knew, in that moment, that these particular discs had become the instrument of Izdran of a Thousand Lives, for it was he who spoke to him.

You never ruled Earth, the nearest disc seemed to say.

"I did!" shouted Nicholas. "I was its conqueror!"

A second disc moved into nearest

position above him.

What of the King of the World —and Agarthi?

This question silenced Nicholas momentarily because it shocked him. It proved conclusively that Izdran knew all about Earth, that he had either a means of visiting other planets or at least of spying on them in a very thorough manner. Even though this realization gave rise to new hopes, at the same time the mention of the King of the World and the mystic city of Agarthi filled him with misgivings. Agarthi's plan and purpose, now supported by Stephen Germain, had always opposed the world that Nicholas had sought to establish.

What of Agarthi? — came the repeated question.

"There were greater powers still!" replied Nicholas. "My secret allies —possessed of interstellar science!"

Gone!—retorted the mental voice of Izdran, as the discs still hovered above. *Vanquished by even greater powers! Your enlisting the aid of the malignant interstellar powers which have held Earth in bondage for twenty milleniums led to failure, since their emergence brought upon your forces and theirs the far superior strength and power of the Elder Race—that same race which destroyed my own world of Nr-lan, whose fragments you now refer to as the asteroids. The Elder Race has declared our form of life to be outlawed and inimical to all civilizations*

in the universe, so the last survivors of the Nrlani have had to conceal themselves for millenia of time in a place which seems to have remained even beyond the reach of the Elders, fortunately for us. For thousands of years I have been preparing to take the Earth and the solar system, to destroy the renegade interstellars who ruled your planet in secret, and to defy the Elder Race who forced this long exile upon us. Now your interstellar overlords are extinct, it is true, but your idiotic ambitions have again focussed the attention of the so-called benevolent Elders on Sol and its planets. It does not matter that they have already returned to their own distant part of the universe, and that with them has gone their Star Warden, whom you refer to as the King of the World. Still, Agarthi exists, and the elders are behind it. The Elders aided Agarthi in destroying your secret allies and they destroyed your ship in which you sought to escape to Mars. This I have learned by means that are unknown to you. If they should discover now that you and your companion did actually effect an escape to this planet they might follow and destroy you. If you attempted to attack the Earth, with our help, they might try to destroy us all. What have you to say to that?

Without hesitation, Nicholas answered, "With the interstellar foes of Agarthi destroyed and the Elder

Race and the Star Warden gone, that leaves only Agarthi alone, and the Elder's sole terrestrial deputy, Stephen Germain. Germain stands between us and the conquest of the solar system. If you attack swiftly and in force you have a chance of facing the Elders when or if they return. If you do not attack him, he will attack *you*. Do you want to sit and wait for it? Now cut out this childish witchcraft and let's talk business! Unless I see you personally I'll not commune with any of your disguises. Where are you?"

For several agonizing minutes there was no reply. The discs above Nicholas milled about restlessly. Then he heard again the same distant laughter he had heard before when Izdran had spoken to him through the *krnar* spiders down in the camp.

You have possibilities, came Izdran's mental voice. We shall meet and discuss a few details concerning them.

"When!" shouted Nicholas.

At dawn—came the reply.

In that instant, the six discs shot into the sky so fast that it was equivalent almost to instantaneous disappearance. Only the starlit desert remained, and the cold winds with their nostalgic whisperings of forgotten events beyond recorded time.

The broad firmament of the Unknown stretched before Nicholas' mind as immeasurable and unreachable as all the physical infinitudes of space, and for a moment he des-

paired of ever scratching its surface—there were so many mysteries, there was yet so much to learn.

But then, humanly, he sought to cover the nakedness of humility with a cloak of egotism. He caught again his old dream of conquest, his visions of triumph and glory. Once more he saw himself as Nicholas the First, Emperor of all Men. He walked again through the marble halls of his palaces in the major cities of Eurasia, his shining boots heralding his approach to the subservient multitudes who served him. But this time those boots would ring in the sacred corridors of a certain building at Lake Success. He would change the once-shattered and rebuilt United Nations into a United Empire! And he would rule from the caverned Paradise of Agarthi, itself. As far as the Nrlani were concerned, they could go to the devil. He'd find a way to trick them out of their share once they had served him—regardless of who or what they were . . .

Having reached a point of decision, his will relaxed its intensity and he found no further armament against fatigue. He retired to the camp and Grlahn's trading booth. But before he surrendered himself to sleep his active mind unearthed several unsettled questions.

The Nrlani were unquestionably a superior race. The only defense against them would be to fight fire with fire, just as he had done before.

When the hidden interstellar allies he had used to help him conquer Earth threatened Nicholas, Dr. Borg had created the surgical mutant, Stephen Germain, who had served, for a while at least, to hold them at bay before he, too, got out of hand and decided to join forces with Agarthi.

Now then, if after helping him to make a return conquest the Nrlani should play an ace card against him, what would be his defense? Dr. Borg? In the latter days of his defeat, Nicholas had lost Borg. The brilliant scientist might even have followed his own creation, Stephen Germain, over to the Agarthian side, for all he knew. He had always sensed in Borg that weakness which endangers all serviceable intellectuals—*Wisdom*, whose logic turns its victim inevitably from the practical contemplation of self into the stifling void of altruism. You could bargain with a man who wanted something for his own sake, but never with one who was contaminated with the incurable fungus of *Weltschmerz*—world pain, concern for humanity. In Nicholas' personal credo, humanity was a case of every man for himself. Anything else was weakness, fundamental immorality, idiocy. And so, perhaps, Borg would no longer be useful to him.

There was, however, another scientist of great stature in Europe, a German attached to the last remnants of the old Nazi underground

movement. It was he who actually perfected the death ray and contributed directly to the development of nuclear energy from hydrogen and thus from seawater. A brilliant fanatic. When he returned to Earth, he would have to send out tracers for him.

What was his name? Eidelmann. That was it! Gerhardt Eidelmann! Nicholas dozed off, dreaming that bald, myopic Eidelmann was laughing derisively at Izdran. But his dreams could not envision Izdran of a Thousand Lives. In his place was only a terrifying shadow . . .

HE was awakened by Pavlovich. He and Pavlovich were alone in the booth and the gray light of dawn' was upon them. Trinha Llih was gone.

Pavlovich, bearded, pale, disheveled, kneeled over him and shook him. His brown eyes were wide with excitement, but they were clear.

"Better get up!" he said. "Something's going on!"

"You are well," said Nicholas. "The fever is gone. It's good to have you back, Sergeyev. From here on I'm going to need you."

"Listen!" exclaimed Pavlovich, rising to his feet. "Can't you hear them all running away? They're leaving camp in a hurry, but they're not letting a peep out of them!"

Nicholas heard the distant, scurrying sounds, but it was another, more distant sound that caused him

to sit up, then spring to his feet.

"That's thunder!" he exclaimed. "There are no thunder storms on Mars!"

"Look! It's getting darker! There's a big storm brewing!"

"But I hear no wind. Let's go outside."

Outside, the camp was already deserted. Trading booths were left intact with all merchandise and personal belongings. Not even Grlahn had appeared to scabble up his most precious wares. The entire populace of Druhdrui had left as though threatened with plague.

"Look at the sky!" cried Pavlovich.

Nicholas was already looking. It was black with towering clouds—and yet they were not clouds. They were incalculably high and were billowing wildly, like dense smoke in a violent fire. And from them in all directions shot long streamers of lightning, accompanied by reverberating thunder.

"*Proklaty!*" exclaimed Pavlovich. "What the devil is it? I don't like it! That thing's headed right for us! Let's get out of here!"

Incongruously, Nicholas started to laugh. "Do they take us for ignorant savages?" he said. "It's all illusion, or camouflage. And it's all for the Gdjinhji, not for us!"

"But what is it!" shouted Pavlovich, above the rolling roar of the thunder.

"It's the Nrlani," he answered.

"They're staging an appearance. Just keep your eyes open and watch! In a little while you should see a city floating up there in the sky."

"A city—Are you crazy?"

Nicholas turned to fix him with one of his famous stares. "No," he answered. "But *you* have been out of your head for months. Now take my word for it and do as I say. The Nrlani are the only ones who can get us back to Earth. They are the only ones—"

The ground shook with the thunderrings of the gigantic clouds thickening close above their heads, and lightning tendrils licked at the tops of the pyramids.

Pavlovich winced, but he clutched Nicholas' arm in frenzied desperation.

"Back to Earth!" he shouted. "Don't play with me! Tell me the truth!"

"It *is* the truth! I tell you I've already made an alliance! They will help us retake the Earth—and smash Germain. You want that, don't you?"

Pavlovich straightened. A cold gleam came into his eyes. His bearded chin jutted out and he swelled out his big chest and clenched his fat, muscular fists.

Smash Germain!—Nothing in life would be more worth while! No man had contributed so much to his personal degradation and misery as had Germain. He hated Germain with a passion that seemed to elim-

inate all other reasons for living.

So here at last was a chance to get back. Pavlovich winced no longer at the lightning and the thunder. Like Nicholas, he waited, with an amused grin on his face and an icy gleam in his eyes.

The Nrlani, mysterious survivors of the Fifth Planet, were emerging from *God knew where!*

SUDDENLY, the nature of the spectacle above them changed. The lightnings and the thunderings ceased. The wild billowings of the black clouds ceased, and from the depths of the induced darkness began to emerge an aethereal glow that rivaled the dawnlight.

Simultaneously, the clouds themselves began to attenuate, and their ears were assailed by a clash of celestial cymbals, initiating a roll of drums and a blast of invisible trumpets.

"No wonder the natives call the Nrlani gods," Nicholas remarked. "Such a spectacle could convert seventy per cent of Earth's population to any faith overnight."

"Could gods do it any better?" put in Pavlovich. "They might as well be gods."

As an indescribably beautiful symphony hurled unearthly music at them from the sky and light emerged from above like a dozen sunrises, Nicholas' nostrils flared and his eyes narrowed.

"There is no sphere of supernatural phenomena," he insisted. "All

is physical reality—even Heaven, itself, if it exists—as tangible as any concubine! Remember that, Sergeyev, in all that may soon transpire! For here is much of the Unknown—yet one thing we know about it. It cannot violate the physical fundamental of Cause and Effect. And as such it may be understood—and conquered!"

Pavlovich did not express the thought that perhaps his master was afflicted with insanity, after all. He was not illiterate, Pavlovich. There was a word for Nicholas' affliction. It was called megalomania.

But once before this megalomania had subjugated thirty nations of the Earth to his rule. What would happen now, with the Nrlani behind him? Mentally, Pavlovich shrugged. Why should he complain if it meant that the crumbs he would gather from Nicholas' banquet table of conquest would be as *empire* to others?

"Look!" shouted Nicholas. "There it is!"

There it was, indeed. A city. A floating city, high in the sky but lowering rapidly toward them. A glowing city of vast splendour and beautiful simplicity, translucent, seemingly composed of a single crystalline substance. Actually, as they were to learn, it was made of a wonder substance, simultaneously metallic and plastic, transparent or opaque, as it pleased its inhabitants, densified or attenuated into invisibility, as occasion required—including the inhabitants, themselves.

"You say you have an alliance with these people," said Pavlovich. "When did you make it? Do they know we are here?"

"Their leader, Izdran, has stipulated he would meet me at dawn. Look! The sun is rising! I have an idea. Izdran is very specific. He *means* at dawn. The time is now! Come on!"

Beyond the pyramids, in the desert, the stupendous city was coming to rest. It towered well above the tallest pyramids, and it sprawled for miles.

Nicholas had brought his rifle. Now, with the dubious weapon clutched in his hands, he started running, which was an easy feat on Mars, even for the Martians, much less difficult for an Earthman. Pavlovich followed.

Beyond the pyramids they came to a halt, just once, to take in the situation. Before them, half a kilometer away, was the great sky city, resting silently and enigmatically on the desert, waiting. The thunders and lightnings and blinding light and celestial music and fanfare were all gone now. There reigned a silence which seemed grimly purposeful.

Close at hand, the two Earthmen observed for the first time a row of man-sized jars which the Gdjinhji had set out for the Nrlani. They were filled with *grabeal*, the black substance from Khandarna in the South. Across the desert marched an equal number of telepathic robots

carrying bales of *ca'ta*, dream manna from the sky.

"Come on!" said Nicholas. "Let's get going!"

"Wait!"

It was Trinha's voice, behind them. They turned and observed her girlish figure emerging from between the outermost pyramids of Druh-drui. She was without her *krnar* shawl, but the cloak garment concealed her breasts. Her black hair danced behind her as she ran—desperately.

"She is a hindrance," growled Nicholas.

"She's terrific," said Pavlovich.

"We must get rid of her!" Nicholas fingered his rifle, purposefully.

"No!" exclaimed Pavlovich. "Wait!"

"With the fate of worlds at stake? Come to your senses! Better to shoot her now than be encumbered with a brainless female—"

Trinha heard this latter remark as she came up to them. Her eyes flashed as did her white teeth, and her nostrils flared. She spoke to them in the higher language of Mars. There were two languages, an ordinary one, and a higher form of the same language, with more colorful inflexions and shades of meaning, which both men also understood. It was called *Dlanat'la*.

"Think you that I am a senseless clod of clay?" she fired at them. "My people are conditioned to flee in terror from the sky lords whenever they appear, but my star-long-

ing has vanquished my instinctive fears. I am here—and I claim a place among you! Take me as you will—as mistress or partner—but take me! I would enter the sky city and go with you to the ends of Creation if it lead me one day to Panh, planet of seas and mountains and teeming cities! Only death alone could stay my will!”

As Nicholas turned the muzzle of his rifle at her she clutched it to her breast and glared at him. “Either take me with you or kill me!” she said.

It rang a bell in Nicholas. Either he would conquer the Earth or he would destroy it, himself included, if need be. Hers was the same principle—the end justifying the means.

“Let her come as far as the Nrlani will permit it!” said Pavlovich. “They’ll decide for her!”

“Come on, then!” said Nicholas.

The three of them ran as fast as they could toward the Nrlani city . . .

THEY passed by the robots without incident. Either the three-eyed automatons were under control to accomplish one purpose, or the Nrlani were deliberately lowering all barriers to receive their three guests.

As they approached the base of the sky city an opening appeared. A circular, translucent section ten feet wide suddenly attenuated, exposing a lavender light behind it. Here was no door or sliding hatch—just a space where the wall had been.

Wordlessly, they entered a square,

empty chamber, and as they did so the wall densified behind them.

“We’re trapped!” shouted Pavlovich.

“Shut up!” said Nicholas. “The more you show fear in this place the more it’s going to cost us!”

Trinha said nothing, but her face was flushed and her lips were nearly white with terror, but her eyes stared at Nicholas with strange determination. A light film of perspiration lay on her forehead and upper lip.

“Do you notice they’ve given us Earth atmosphere and temperature?” Nicholas remarked. “I’d say it’s an even sixty-eight degrees at fourteen point seven pounds and about twenty per cent oxygen, plus about sixty percent relative humidity. Not bad.”

As Trinh sank to her knees, Pavlovich made a further discovery. “And this is Earth gravity! How do they do it?”

“Have you noticed the scent? It’s an odor, a familiar one—yet not experienced in years.”

“Yeah. It’s familiar and I like it, but what is it?”

Nicholas grasped his companion’s arm. “Sergeyev, do you remember the Black Sea—Sochi, Alupka? My summer villa at Alupka! *That’s* the kind of air they’re giving us! I could not have imagined such perfect synthesis! It’s marvelous!”

“I’m glad you think so. It scares hell out of me! *Sukin syn!* My hair must be standing on end!”

Suddenly, the translucence of the inner walls resolved into transpar-

ency. Through them they could see an endless succession of rooms similar to theirs, as though the whole structure of the sky city's foundation were a glass bee-hive with square cells. The transparency tapered off with distance, as though they were in the depths of a tropical sea gazing upon an endless jungle of crystalline coral. Here and there were denser shapes suggesting compact machines. By their very compactness they demonstrated to Pavlovich and Nicholas a power and efficiency which lay centuries beyond their own age.

"Ye gods, look!" cried Pavlovich.

Trinha gasped, stifling a scream.

Approaching them, *through* the walls, came a telepathic robot. Attenuation occurred before it in each wall as it advanced. Thus the two Russians perceived that corridors were not necessary in this place.

"I want to get out of here!" yelled Pavlovich. "To hell with it!"

Nicholas gripped his arm fiercely. "Get hold of yourself or I'll blast your brains out!" He still held his rifle.

Pavlovich's eyes were wide, staring at Nicholas, the rifle and the approaching robot, like an animal at bay.

Swiftly, Nicholas added, "What transpires in the next few hours and how we react to it will affect our entire future and that of the Earth, as well—perhaps of the entire solar system! Now straighten up that god-dam backbone of yours and act like

a man!"

There was nothing more to say, inasmuch as the robot came through an attenuated wall-section and stood before them. Trinha, perspiring and terrified, crowded into the farthest corner of the room.

Nicholas took the initiative. "Take us to Izdran!" he commanded the robot.

Expressionlessly, the tall robot, towering a head above Nicholas, focussed its central "eye" upon him, and all three humans in the room *sensed* its telepathic reply.

They were welcome. They would see Izdran. But first—they were to be reconditioned . . .

FROM that moment on and over the space of twenty-four hours they had little sense of the passage of time. They could only look back on the episode as a peaceful dream—a dream of resuscitation. Chemical baths and radiant treatments plus special injections and perfectly prepared meals and induced sleep completely rejuvenated the two Earthmen after their year-long exposure to their Martian environment. An extra treatment was given to Trinha which enabled her respiratory organs to make a more comfortable adaptation to Earth's atmospheric conditions. Furthermore, synthetic clothing was supplied with meticulous thoroughness, each of the two men being dressed in the best taste according to their native world. They were even dressed to suit their in-

dividual temperaments, Pavlovich in a pin-striped double-breasted suit with a loud tie and a simulated diamond stick-pin, and Nicholas in formal evening dress. Either out of meticulous forethought or premeditated irony, his old medal was back on his shirt-front where he had worn it on state occasions—the ruby and diamond studded Star of Honor, symbol of his erstwhile imperial power over all Eurasia, not to mention the lower half of South America.

Trinha was garbed in a gorgeous black taffeta evening gown creation with low neckline and broad, off-the-shoulder straps supporting transparent kimona sleeves. Her make-up and page boy coiffure were perfect. Thus transformed in appearance to Earth standards she came near to surpassing them.

She could say nothing, but her sudden delight and wonderment enabled her to stand, in spite of her unaccustomed high heels. Pavlovich was torn between fear of the miraculous Nrlani and desire for Trinh. He took hold of her arm to give her support.

But Nicholas fumed. "What do they think we are—children? Are they trying to make fun of us or just waste time?" He shouted at the walls, since their robot had disappeared. "Let's get on with it, Izdran! There's work to be done!" In his hands, incongruously, he still held his rifle.

The walls, which had become translucent again, suddenly became

transparent—and Trinh screamed. Beneath their feet was a great glowing globe suspended in space. It was Mars. The sky city had retreated into the void.

"*You have but to approach me,*" said Izdran. His voice seemed to emanate from nowhere and from everywhere. "*Just follow the disc.*"

In the center of the room a small disc creature appeared, such as Nicholas had seen atop the pyramid. It moved away from them toward one of the walls, and as it did so the wall attenuated.

"Come on!" said Nicholas. "Believe only half of what you see and forget about the rest. I'm going to Izdran!" Whereupon, he stepped into the next chamber, following the disc.

"Come on!" echoed Pavlovich, tugging at Trinh's arm.

"I—I can't!" she exclaimed. "I can't face—Izdran!"

It was a good excuse for Pavlovich. He picked her up in his arms and followed Nicholas and the disc through the walls . . .

BEFORE long, they were on the main level of the city proper. Streets were mere channels for moving ramps which carried the omnipresent robots to their destinations. The buildings were neither dwellings nor places of business. They were windowless, vaguely transparent, apparently housing endless batteries of power generators. Some were factories. In others they heard multi-

tudinous clicking noises like those of gigantic cybernetic brains making ceaseless computations. There was also great evidence, as Nicholas pointed out, of an abnormal amount of ultra high frequency reception and transmission, because there were transmission towers everywhere. There were no clumsy antenna wires for multiple meter wavelengths, but mysterious globes which seemed to house tiny condenser apparatus for the reception of wavelengths less than a centimeter in length. And there was much that was beyond their comprehension. But it soon became evident to them, and to Trinha, as they were carried along the ramps, that this was no city designed for living. It was a superman's fortress buzzing with a fixed design and purpose.

But where were the overlords of Mars? Where were the Nrlani—and where was Izdran of a Thousand Lives?

Abruptly, as though their flying disc guide had read their minds, they were led off the ramp into a building that towered ten stories high in the approximate center of the city, beneath the transparent dome that protected them from the empty cold of space. Here, for the first time, were signs of another type of life. At least robots would not have appreciated the rich, colorful carpeting, the scenic murals of an alien planet—now long dead—or the jewel encrusted pillars and sweeping staircases.

"At least they must be human," remarked Pavlovich, still holding Trinha in his arms.

"Don't be deceived," said Nicholas. "The very lack of necessity for such things as these reveals that it is all illusion or camouflage—for our benefit. Remember how easily they produced our present clothing. Be on your toes, Sergeyev. Let me do the talking. And even watch your thoughts. Think as little as possible. This is our big chance, but one slip can cost us the Earth, itself!"

An elevator bounced them to the tenth floor, where Izdran awaited them.

The room occupied practically the whole top of the building. It had neither walls nor ceiling. Just a transparent dome, which was a miniature replica of the titanic dome that covered the city. Around the sides of the room were banks of controls, visiscreens, uncountable instruments, flickering signal lights. In the center of the room, on a large raised dais, was a horse shoe shaped master control bank.

In the center of the horse shoe was a ball of light . . .

"I shall reveal myself to you," said Izdran in the Martian tongue, "at your own risk. I must warn you that not only am I not human; I am anathema to human life. When you see what I really am you will realize why the Elder Race destroyed Nr-lan, the planet on which we evolved. To behold me in reality is to require no further explanation.

But perhaps we have something in common, after all. Tell me this. Suppose I were to place in your hands the means of conquering Earth. What is there to prevent you from trying to take over my share of the spoils as well as your own? Or I'll put it this way. Is there room enough for both of us on your planet?"

"You have asked me a double question," replied Nicholas, quickly, "so I will give you a double answer. There is no room for both of us—naturally. In regard to your first question, what is there to prevent you from blotting me out after I have served your purpose? We both know the answer to that. So it seems we have two problems. The first is to conquer Earth and entrench ourselves against the return of the Elder Race. That we must do together. The second problem is that of conquering each other. That is an individual problem, and I'm prepared to gamble on its outcome when we get to it."

The globe of light flashed with iridescent colors. But this was not a sign of anger. It turned out to be enthusiasm.

"I had feared this was going to be boring," said Izdran, suddenly expressing himself in Russian. "But I see you are mental rather than neuro-endocrine reactive, like your companions. We can talk . . ."

PAVLOVICH lowered Trinha to the floor. She instinctively

kneeled and bowed her head in fear and reverence. Pavlovich extracted a loud handkerchief to wipe cold perspiration from his face.

"Give me first," said Izdran, "the answer to this question. Why do you wish to conquer Earth or the solar system?"

Nicholas hardly hesitated before answering. "Because Earth is run by fools. It is in need of true leadership."

"Do you consider yourself to be worthy of that leadership?"

Nicholas sneered. "It is not a question of worthiness in the moral sense. The fittest shall survive, and the fittest shall lead. I shall take the Earth or its fate will become immaterial to me."

"But why?" persisted Izdran. "What is the basis of your desire to conquer and be the leader? Is it merely a function of your glands?"

"No, it is a function of the mind, just as it is with you. I seek reality, and the only reality is *Power*. I had it once. I shall have it again."

"But you are willing to take grave risks?"

"Naturally."

"There is one risk you have not dwelled on sufficiently."

"What is that?"

"The risk of helping me and my kind to emerge into Tropospheria once more."

"Tropospheria?"

"Yes—the plane of existence that you regard as the Universe, in your own physical sense of the word."

"We have gone over that," said Nicholas. "We are allies. I take it you need me and my organization on Earth to cover up your own identity until the necessary groundwork has been laid for you to stage an appearance. After that it may be too late for the Elder Race to interfere."

"Precisely. But by the same token it may be too late for the human race. *Look!*"

Abruptly, the globe of light collapsed, and Izdran was revealed plainly to them.

Trinha screamed, then fainted. Pavlovich and Nicholas both staggered back, mouths agape.

"Mother of God!" yelled Pavlovich, forgetting the atheism that had been a part of Nicholas' New Russia.

Nicholas' face was a marble mask as he aimed his rifle and fired at Izdran, point blank. But the bullet attenuated into nothingness and the rifle turned into a snake. Nicholas dropped it.

Izdran roared with laughter. "You *are* the servant of your glands!" he said to Nicholas. "Now you can understand why humans can never be as adaptable to their environment as we. We combine the strengths of both human and machine, yet we have eliminated the shortcomings of both. As such we can rule as we please and where we please—except where the accursed Elder Race is concerned. Were it not for them—"

Nicholas scowled. Deliberately, he stooped to pick up the snake he

had dropped. As he did so, it became a rifle again. He pointed it at Izdran, or rather, at one of his triple hearts beating behind the walls of transparent metal cells.

"Now that I have had time for adjustment," he said, "I won't be fooled again."

Pavlovich grasped his arm. "Shoot him!" he screamed. "Kill him! Nothing like that should live!"

Nicholas jerked his arm away and continued to address Izdran, while Pavlovich struggled to quell a violent surge of nausea. "You speak of the Elder Race as being your only barrier. Have you not heard of the present ruler of Earth?"

"Stephen Germain? Yes," replied Izdran. "But you do not know that he has given the government of the planet back into the hands of the people."

"I told you they are all fools!" exclaimed Nicholas. "Germain included. But ordinary terrestrials are worse fools. So Germain has taken a back seat and retired benevolently to Agarthi."

"On the contrary," said Izdran. "He now represents himself as the Star Warden. He has assumed responsibility for the entire Solar System and even plans an early military excursion to Mars."

Nicholas blanched slightly. "What are his plans?" he asked.

"An interesting question. I'd like to know, myself."

"But you have readily acquired all this other information overnight—"

"True, but your Germain is an interesting mutant. He possesses a highly developed ESP. My normal method of investigation would enable him to discover that I am eavesdropping. So far, my—ah—*investigators* have not been able to get to Germain directly. Of course, if I wished to make a *personal* investigation I could find out what I wish to know, but I think Germain is not particularly worthy of much concern on our part. Of course he will have to be eliminated, but the main question is—now that you have seen me do you wish to continue in alliance with the Nrlani?"

"No!" shouted Pavlovich.

Nicholas struck him again with the butt of his rifle and he slumped to the floor with a nasty trail of blood coming from his mouth. Then he turned to Izdran with an icy calmness. "I have seen your work cities on Mars," he said. "Your robots have been building something there for a long time. From what little I saw, I'd say you had a fleet of space warships."

"That is simple deduction. I have several hundred such ships, any *one* of which could wipe out all the orthodox armies, navies and airforces of Earth in forty-eight hours! They are all robot controlled. Moreover, in regard to Germain's intended visit to Mars, should he or some of his underlings achieve this before we strike at Earth, you may have noticed that the Martian natives in those work cities were not so much

slaves as trained soldiery. They are equivalent to a military cadre, and they can be released at any moment to organize all the so-called free natives into a planet-wide army, manning defenses which can be provided by robot teams within a period of a few days."

Nicholas did not mention that he had also noticed the work-city populations were permanently hypnotized, devoid of self-determination. A machine-perfect dictatorship worked here, and he envied it. "Give me *one* of your warships only," he said. "I will go in secret to the Earth and set up the machinery for expanding my contacts and controls in all the nations. It is one thing to conquer by means of superior force. It is another to make good the conquest by installing an efficient governing machine. Once my former agents have lined up their men in each country, we can strike in force. But before I can even operate in secret Stephen Germain must be eliminated. Even when we strike after he is defeated, ninety percent of your fleet may have to concentrate on Agarthi."

"Your companion may serve us in regard to Germain," said Izdran. "He despises Germain worse than he fears the Nrlani. I could give him a specially equipped vessel—"

"Pavlovich?"

"Yes. A suicide vessel. That is, let us call it an expendable vessel, together with the robots I shall place under his control."

"But if Agarthi should even detect his presence—"

"It is an invisible vessel—invisible even to radar. As a matter of fact, no *primary* order of energy could touch it."

"But Germain—"

"Germain and his ESP are elsewhere engaged just now. He is soon to put in an appearance at Lake Success before the Supreme Council of the newly established Terrestrial Government. Lake Success, I understand, is far removed from Agarthi and Agarthian protection. Of course, Germain's ESP is actually second order energy which could detect the death ship Pavlovich will pilot, but he would have to detect it far out in space or it would be too late. Even if the vessel remained out of range of his ESP it could still operate against him. Moreover, I presume that the affairs at the Council will require sufficient concentration on his part to enable Pavlovich to surprise him."

The old gleam of triumph crept into Nicholas' gray eyes. "And while Germain is in New York, exposed to Pavlovich, I can start work in Russia."

"Precisely. I will give you a first line warship, and at your command in outer space will be a hundred more."

Just then Trinha regained consciousness. Simultaneously, Izdran surrounded himself with the globe of light. She drew in her breath sharply and looked at Pavlovich's pros-

trate form.

"What of this girl?" asked Nicholas.

Mentally, he was aware again of distant laughter; but audibly Izdran's voice replied, "There is something in her that can be useful. For the time being, I suggest that you keep her with you."

"But I can't be encumbered—"

"It is a condition of the alliance. Where you go, she goes also."

"But why?"

"I said—she would be useful . . ."

But Izdran avoided mentioning to *whom* Trinha would be useful. Easily, he saw in the Martian girl her new motivation. Earth was no longer her primary goal. Her dream of childhood, her hopes of virgin womanhood, her honor, and the codes of her people—all had been mercilessly shattered and violated by this gray-eyed Earthman whom she thought she had loved. Now he was her first hate. She did not merely wish to destroy him. She wanted to destroy his dreams as he had destroyed hers—then leave him to live with the mangled remains of an existence totally bereft of all meaning and purpose.

Just how she was going to accomplish all this she had left to fate alone. But now Izdran was determined to give her assistance . . .

AFTER Nicholas and Pavlovich had taken over their respective commissions, Izdran had a short conference with his chief aide, Prah.

"It is to be hoped," said Prah, "that your game of spider and fly does not trap the spider." Prah was viewing Nicholas' distant fleet in a second order televiewer, because to primary sources of energy it was invisible.

"Nicholas is a clever planetary, but only that," replied Izdran. "He is only a convenient tool, a thousand years removed from interstellar intelligence."

"But what if the equipment you are placing at his disposal makes it possible for him to take over and use it against us? You know he's planning just that."

Izdran's multi-faceted eye regarded his aide curiously. "Is it possible," he said, "that you are deteriorating? If you were human, I'd say senility was creeping in. Do you forget our secret abilities? And have you forgotten Central Control and its powers? Have you lost confidence in our *greatest* secret of all?"

"All right," retorted Prah, calmly enough. "What if Nicholas, Pavlovich, or this infant mutant, Germain, should stumble upon *that*?"

"What could they do even if they did? Could any of them get *in* to Central? You know what would happen to any Earthman who tried it. No, Prah, this is our time. True, our seventh sense warns us of danger ahead, and this is the deepest bond between us. The picture is almost impossible to grasp, a kaleidoscopic tapestry of inevitabilities mixed indefinitely into vague probabil-

ity patterns. In those patterns are the shapes of space armadas engaged in mortal combat, of worlds afire, and of mentalities locked in a struggle that will affect the destinies even of interstellar races. But this very danger calls us into action. The time is ripe for emerging from this accursed secret hiding. The Nrlanian race can no longer continue as the abhorred species of the Universe. We must rebuild ourselves, even to interstellar stature. And when we do we'll be masters of the Universe, Prah—in *two* planes of existence! Then this living forever* won't be so monotonous. There will be ever new horizons . . ."

"We have a chance of tripping over some hidden deficiency," persisted Prah. "Not being human, we can't foresee all the probabilities resulting from the stimuli you are giving these two Earthmen, even with the help of our seventh sense. You had better watch Nicholas directly."

"I intend to. All I have to do is provide myself with a safety factor. To do that I must find in Nicholas what Earthmen call the 'Achilles' heel.' And I believe Nicholas has one."

"What is that?"

"There is an Earth woman. In his secret heart of hearts, his dreams of triumph and power are evaluated in relation to what they might mean in her eyes. He speaks of seeking the reality of *Power*. The reality behind all that is her. He intends to take her when he gets ready."

"Do you mean the mutant's wife—Lillian Germain?"

"Yes. I think I'll look into the affairs of Nicholas the First from that direction and perhaps kill two birds with one stone, as the Terrestrial say."

So it was that that night Izdran projected one of his astral entities Earthward. He would not have called his two astral entities souls. He would have called them second order complements of his dual physical personality. Just as he had two brains, he had two second order complements. One of these remained behind and served to keep Izdran going about his daily affairs in normal fashion. But one of his brains slept, for its second order counterpart traveled afar, seeking Earth—and Lillian Germain.

And in the meantime, the Nrlanian city dropped further into space and hurtled in a matter of hours to a vantage point one million miles from Earth. Izdran's other half, and Prah, too, wanted a more first-hand view of events which were soon to unfold . . .

* * *

PAVLOVICH'S bushy brows drew together over the hairy wart between them, and his brown eyes narrowed in concentration as he watched Earth grow in his telescreen. From the very latest information given to him by Nicholas, who had gotten it from Izdran, Stephen Ger-

main was in New York, more than twelve thousand miles removed from the Himalayas and hidden Agarthi. Just how long he would be there no one knew, but it was assumed he would be detained at Lake Success for at least a week.

Pavlovich's thick lips spread in a mirthless grin, showing large, uneven teeth. It would only take this space-buggy another twenty-four hours to get within striking range.

Before, he had feared Germain's mutant brain, but now he was heavily equipped with defensive and offensive armament that could give Agarthi, itself, a bad time. And he was not alone.

Each of the ten robots in his crew was the equivalent of a whole squad of geniuses. And they were response-conditioned to answer only to him!

He turned in triumph to look at them. They stood around the walls of the control room, towering above him, watching, waiting—mechanically, electronically, chemically, and *mentally* alive—superman machines of a future age.

"What are you thinking about?" he shouted at them.

In perfect unison, their quiet thoughts returned to him: *Stephen Germain must die, Sir.*

"Good!" shouted Pavlovich. He rose to his feet and rubbed his hands. It reminded him of the old days in the training camps during World War Three. These were his new captains. He had always despised lieutenants because a certain

second lieutenant had once made life miserable for him when he was a sergeant, so it had doubly fanned his ego to be in a position to berate their superior officers. He liked to think of the robots as captains, since his last commission had been that of a major. Now he paced the deck back and forth in front of them.

"What else did I tell you?" he barked at them.

To call you Sir.

"No! No! I mean—yes, that's right! But what happens after the death of Stephen Germain?" He stopped his pacing and tensed, watching them fiercely, as though he carried a whip in his hand.

We are to help you to overcome Nicholas, Sir.

The Russian's eyes glistened and his heavy brows arched, uncovering the wart. "Why!" he shouted.

Nicholas is no damn good. He's no friend of yours. He's going to pay for his past treatment of you, Sir, and his goddam arrogance.

"And what else?"

Trinha Llih, that little Martian bitch, will be captured, because she's yours and no one else's. Nicholas has no right to her. He just wants you to do the dirty work, Sir. He wants all the gravy, Sir. And you can go to hell, Sir. We are to help you see to it that the only gravy he gets will be the stains, Sir.

It was parrot repetition, but Pavlovich was content. These robots were worth all the generals in the

world.

"Take the controls, Number One," he said to one of the robots, "I'm going to get some sleep."

Yes, Sir—replied Number One. Effortlessly, the robot moved into the pilot's seat and scanned the control panels, its synthetic brain absorbing all the factors of flight and its metal fingers making all necessary corrective adjustments in one one hundredth of the time it would have taken the Russian.

Pavlovich did not dare to condition the robots against their original masters, the Nrlani, for fear he would trip over a built-in defense mechanism and get himself betrayed to Izdran before he had even started to carry out his secret plans against them. Germain and Nicholas were merely in his way, and he sought his own kind of revenge with each. But the Nrlani were impossible! They *had* to be destroyed somehow.

He did not know whether or not the telepathic robots had read this intention in his mind and already relayed it to Izdran. If they had, he presumed that Izdran would be too derisive to do anything about it unless he took positive action against the Nrlani. Out of their own egotism, the Nrlani would give him time, like cats playing with a very small mouse, or perhaps they regarded him as a flea!

Pavlovich bared his teeth and glared at his robots. "I'll show the sonsofbitches!" he growled.

Thus Pavlovich and his invisible

ship, equipped with weapons which were new even to age-old Agarthi, ancient colony of the Elder Race. A little megalomaniac on a rampage. A chimpanzee on a holiday—in an atom bomb arsenal. Below him lay the naked Earth . . .

* * *

AT Lake Success, the newly reinstated United Nations, operating under their popularized but unofficial name of Terrestrial Government, were engaged in the formal business of establishing the Terrestrial Government officially. But first there was the dubious matter of the "World Charter" which Agarthi had proposed. Russian delegate Gormski, soon to be Soviet Councilman for T.G., concluded his two hour filibuster with unbridled accusations.

"Mr. Germain, who represents a supposed sovereign state called Agarthi, has not even any legal right to sit with us in council inasmuch as Agarthi has never been formally recognized by the established governments of the world. Yet he has the temerity, nay, the affrontery, to assume the position of benevolent overlord, and he seeks to cram down our throats a document which he calmly asserts *must* be the charter and constitution of our Terrestrial Government!"

Applause, at this point, from twenty-seven Eurasian delegates. The Western Hemisphere bloc of delegates either looked at each other

in dismay or compared notes. Triumphant, Gormski continued.

"He and his Agarthian accomplices in this insane and preposterous hoax are very kind to us!—in that they have established in the main body of this document a truly democratic and self-determined system of world government—of the people, by the people, and for the people. But the Emergency Clause, gentlemen! I ask you to examine *that!* Are we to be besieged by the lunatic ravings of a hoaxer, or are we to engage in the sober activity of rehabilitating a world whose shambles are the direct *result* of meddling by these charlatans and turbaned star-gazers of Agarthi?"

Fifteen Eastern bloc delegates got to their feet and cheered, while the Council's Australian chairman banged his gavel for order. Gormski dramatically poured himself a drink of water and made a Hitlerian gesture with his hand, for silence.

"The Emergency Clause of this idiotic document states, and I quote: 'In the event of further extra-terrestrial aggression, a state of Universal Emergency will be recognized. In this case, Agarthi will acquire all emergency powers of government which are delineated under Section II-b of this Emergency Clause.'

"Those emergency powers, gentlemen, constitute sheer dictatorship! We are to manufacture munitions and armaments to Agarthian specifications, provide the Agarthians with all the manpower, industrial

facilities and economic assistance that may be required, in their own vaunted opinion, to be necessary!"

Former U.S. Senator Balfour, now a U.N. delegate, could not resist breaking the rules of order. "The Soviet delegate is begging many questions," he said to his microphone, in Esperanto, which was now the official U.N. language. "Agarthi has given us a gift of freedom from extra-terrestrial aggression. We are receiving the unquestionable benefits of interstellar science, we are beginning even to adapt the titanic forces of Universal Power to our needs, and we are even now being assisted in building this planet's first space armada. Surely the very spectacular and impressive events of the past five years—"

"I have not finished!" shouted Gormski, appealing to the chairman, who regretfully informed Mr. Balfour that he was out of order. And Gormski continued. "Many of you wish to adhere to blind faith in relation to the events of the past five years. But this is *too* blind. It is not faith, but gullibility built upon a false premise. We are told that we have been saved from slavery at the hands of long hidden alien intelligences from the stars. We have seen cities vanish in the supposed struggle which went on mainly above our heads. We have seen the Agarthian space ships, and we are building space ships of our own with the help of Agarthian technicians. All that this means is that the Agarthians are

smart people and that Mr. Germain, is, as proved further by reputable physicians and psychologists, a surgical mutant and therefore a super-genius. But it does *not* prove that he has not perpetrated on us a colossal hoax in order to deceive us and cause our more gullible associates to believe that it would be favorable to accept his terms. Then, to exert his emergency powers over us, he would have only to repeat his brutal and destructive hoax at the expense of a few more defenseless cities, and the Emergency Clause would be invoked!

"No, gentlemen, my government, for one, refuses to accept this charter. If Mr. Germain wishes to offer us his services, that is well and good. But we reject his right to dominate us. This is supposed to be a sovereign world now, so we reserve the right to govern ourselves, *even* in the emergencies. Is that simple enough for you, Mr. Balfour?"

The U.S. delegate glanced at Stephen Germain. "I prefer to give the floor to the 'defendant'," he said, with unruffled sarcasm directed at Gormski. And again the chairman banged for order, while he nodded to Germain . . .

STEPHEN Germain's Indian physiognomy remained as inscrutable as ever as all eyes turned upon him. Under dark, forward-jutting brows, his shiny black eyes gazed penetratingly at Gormski. Although he was of American Indian extraction, the

turban he wore to conceal his abnormal cranium gave him an East Indian appearance, plus an aura of the mystic.

"My position is unalterable," he said, in a calm but vibrantly authoritative tone. "Just as a citizen of any government may relinquish his citizenship in favor of another nationality, I have, of necessity, relinquished even terrestrial citizenship. Mr. Kent here is your Agarthian delegate. I do not sit here in council with you. I am merely an observer. I am the terrestrial deputy of the Elder People, who saved us all from destruction. As their representative I am their Star Warden in charge of this entire Solar System. I speak to you with the authority of a vastly superior race of benevolent beings, and the government of this planet is only one of my present responsibilities. My orders are to help you to govern yourselves, but at the same time to guide you in the fundamental principle of civilization throughout the universe. That principle embodies Man's total *raison d'être*. It is development from Finite to Infinite—toward godliness, to put it in a plainer sense. The road to Infinite is cooperation and constructiveness. Internal wars and nationalism will not be tolerated. In the event of danger from malignant interstellar forces, I am to exert my powers to defend you, while at the same time helping you to defend yourselves and thus enable you to occupy your rightful place in total

civilization.

"For these reasons you must accept the charter. Is that plain enough for you, Mr. Gormski?"

"An ultimatum!" shouted Gormski, jumping to his feet. "Mr. Germain defies the world!"

Many delegates raised their voices above the gavel in support of Gormski, but Germain quickly dominated the assembly. He arose to deliver his next words, his eyes penetrating each one who listened to him.

"You have now emerged from the cocoon of your own atmosphere. Terrestrial Man is a new metamorphosis taking wing in the limitless oceans of outer space. This is a form of birth, gentlemen, and I assure you that the mortality rate in such cases is high.

"You have become aware of *contact*. Contact, that is, with interstellar forces. Just as you have been the property of interstellar peoples for ages without knowing it, you can be again. But let me make this point clear to you. You are *not* the property of the Elder People. Rather, you are their wards until you come of age. The dangers, let me remind you, are far from being behind you. They lie ahead. You are not expected to acquire overnight an adequate perspective of the incomprehensible. You are merely expected to accept protection and guidance until you have progressed sufficiently to carry on independently yet in cooperation with universal civilization."

At that moment, a fanatic who had represented himself as a Soviet news reporter, suddenly jumped from the Press box and aimed an automatic at Germain. Guards shouted and started running, women reporters screamed, and television cameramen switched gleefully to telephoto lenses.

"Down with the tyrant!" shouted the assassin.

But that was as far as he got. In the next instant he became as rigid as a statue, totally incapacitated. Security guards carried him away.

Gormski was on his feet again, shouting extemporaneously while pointing dramatically at Germain.

"That man is a monster!" he cried out. "You see now how invulnerable he is! He paralyzed his would-be assassin! He could have killed him. He could kill us all, from where he is sitting, with no other weapon than that Frankenstein brain of his! I ask you, in all reasonableness, fellow humans, before Heaven!—Could not such a man hypnotize us all into believing what he says?—by conjuring up the mere vision of alien space ships and filling our minds with fear, forcing the susceptible ones to succumb and hysterically give him all the power over us that he desires? I declare that here before you is the danger and the aggression! Throw him out! Destroy him!"

There was a rising hubbub, and many were on their feet shouting at each other. Some reporters dashed out, others stayed on, greedily, while

some spectators merely fled. But soon again Germain's even, authoritative voice dominated the loud-speakers.

"That was an insidious plot, Mr. Gormski, designed to prove your point. I would suggest you pay off your collaborator and get the devil out of here yourself! This is an assembly for statesmen, not gangsters!"

The Australian chairman banged his gavel. "This confusion calls for adjournment!" he said.

"Yes!" agreed Gormski. "And I propose that the first subject on our next agenda shall be the question of the legality of Mr. Germain's presence here, and of Mr. Kent's, as well as of Agarthi's chair in this council and of the proposed Agarthian charter. Until these questions are settled we cannot discuss anything!"

There was an immediate response in favor of this motion, although the American and British delegates remained non-committal.

Within both Germain's and Kent's crania resided sealed instruments the size of a pea. Originally, they had been the size of a basketball, but thanks to Dr. Borg's rediscovery of the Elder method of densification they had been reduced to a size which had enabled him to install about a dozen of them in the heads of Agarthi's leaders. These were micro-telaugs, over which they received augmented telepathic messages or transmitted the same, at will. Also, the micro-telaug was the

relayer of power transmitted from Agarthian laboratories with which any attacker could be paralyzed.

It was Kent who had paralyzed the fanatic, although Germain could have killed him, as Gormski had claimed, with no other weapon than his own brain. When the assassin had leaped from the Press box, Germain was occupied with a message from Agarthi. Kent received it, too. Borg and Mandir, an Agarthian Elder, communicated with them saying that certain experiments with sub-matter had produced a second order type of energy, and certain results of this discovery had led them to suspect the presence of alien space ships within the orbit of the moon. If their deductions were valid, they were faced with a very advanced foe who could never be detected by the giant network of space-radar screens that had recently been erected by the principal nations of the world. Could Germain use his ESP to see what he could pick up? Germain would, at his first opportunity to concentrate, which would be back at his hotel.

As a squad of reporters approached Germain, Kent asked him, "You going to let them know?"

"No," he answered. "Not until we get the situation in hand. The nations have such a high opinion of their abilities now that they'd dash out in their new space buggies and pull a Don Quixote on us. Because that's what it would be, a toothpick against windmills. They're babes in

the woods, and those who wouldn't be getting themselves killed and throwing every defense we've given them down the drain would be succumbing to mass hysteria. So keep it under your hat."

"Mr. Germain!" cried the New York Times reporter, an elderly man with horn-rimmed glasses and wearing cigars instead of a handkerchief. "About that assassination attempt—do you actually suspect Gormski?"

"Or if you don't think it's just another Russian veto with a kick," said the Los Angeles Times, a younger man with short-cropped sandy hair, "would the motive be political or have some connection with economic pressure groups who have been locked out of the old cartel pastures by reason of your influence in Terrestrial Government?"

Germain paused on his way to the exit with Kent. His keen, dark eyes, as they looked over the trailing crowd of reporters, did not even blink at the flash bulbs of the photographers. "It is difficult for you to remember," he said, "that I am capable of reading such minds as Gormski's like a book, as well as your own. It all follows an old, old pattern, and yet everyone fails to realize that history is no longer repeating itself. There is no precedent for *Now*. The old perspectives are a surface scum. It's not the details but the fundamentals you'll have to grasp before you will be able to even survive in your new environment."

“I could strangle that Gormski with my one good hand,” Kent told Germain on their way back to the hotel. He glared ruefully at his withered left arm, caused by a death ray one night in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, during World War Three. Pavlovich had done that—Pavlovich who had since died out among the asteroids along with his master, Nicholas I. Since then there had been greater masters to subdue. Interstellar masters. But thanks to the Elder Race, the King of the World, and Germain’s surgical mutation, they had survived every campaign—even that hellish space battle out by Eros which had resulted in that planetoid’s complete liquidation.

Germain smiled at his old battle buddy. “Don’t worry about Gormski,” he said, as their U.S. Government furnished limousine slid through the evening traffic. “He is a mere straw in *this* gathering storm. The main worry is public apathy. The transition from planetary to interstellar status, even though we have not yet made an interplanetary flight, has been too abrupt. Of necessity, the science that Earth would not ordinarily come to know in two or three thousand years has been brought to light, and the people just don’t comprehend the significance of their new position. They merely think the promised Millenium is at hand, that Cornucopia has at last turned the corner. They relax when they should be sharpening their wits. But there’s more to it than that. I

sense a really great danger—”

“You mean those space ships might actually be out there?”

Germain looked at Kent, pensively. “I mean a danger much greater than mere alien space armadas. The cybernetics lab at Agarthi has been working on some interesting statistics connected with the decadence of present-day civilization. I mean—stuff like political corruption, graft, embezzlement, juvenile delinquency, the collapse of moral standards, lower church attendance, the increase of divorces, murders, suicides, infanticides, patricides, perversion, narcotics addiction, et cetera. Do you know what the computers tell us?”

“I know. Decline and fall of the Romans all over again. This is the old cycle again, eh?”

“No. You’re wrong. The computers show that the rapid increase of these phenomena cannot be correlated with the maximum probability curves. That means—”

Kent’s pipe dropped from his mouth and he caught it in his hands. “Oh, no! Not that again! Not another extraneous influence!”

“I’m very much afraid so,” said Germain.

“But good God, we’ve cleansed the Earth! The old underground interstellar influences were rooted out—even Satanus, himself! What else could—”

“Kent, there is another force somewhere, powerful and dangerous because of its very subtlety, which is attempting to undermine human-

ity *from the inside*. Suppose—" The limousine stopped in front of their hotel.

"Suppose what?"

"Never mind. It's a long story."

The two men got out and a reluctant doorman nodded recognition. He had already seen the evening headlines concerning the affair at Lake Success. Gormski had succeeded in sowing the dragon seeds of suspicion in the riotous field of world opinion . . .

THAT night, Germain shut himself up in the bedroom while Kent sat quietly in a chair and read the evening papers. He was suddenly disinterested in the feature news concerning the U.N. meeting, in spite of such glaring 144-point headlines as: GERMAIN HURLS ULTIMATUM!—and: AGARTHI CHARTER ILLEGAL: GORMSKI.

After Germain's remarks in the car, Kent became vividly aware of a much greater crisis hidden between the lines of every common article and advertisement in the paper. He thought: There's nothing so hidden but the obvious.

As he read, he could almost hear the thunder of walls crumbling to destruction—the walls of civilization:

Loan Gifts Bared by Air Force Aide—Doctor Kidnapped For Dope—Thrill Party Sex Show Kills Girl Fourteen.

It was not all in the U.S.A. Kent was something of a polyglot and was

in the habit of balancing his perspectives with news from abroad. He saw that Europe had its own quota of corruption, murder, divorces and general dereliction. There was an advertisement in a French newspaper guaranteeing that the strip tease girls of a certain burlesque show would take off everything. Guaranteed nakedness.

What topped it off and ruined his appetite for supper was an article concerning a New York suburb, captioned: *Abandoned Church Site to be Improved*.

He read that the half-finished church, because of insufficient community funds, was being cleared away for a large dancing casino and bowling alley, the money for which had been raised through a community owned amusement corporation!

Nothing wrong with dancing and bowling, but it was a gross distortion of relative values to say the abandoned church site was being *improved*.

He flicked on the television set. A loan shark huckster was giving a commercial.

"Why worry about paying the other guy until *you* have been taken care of first?" bawled the huckster, pointing an accusing finger at Kent. "*You're* the guy who does the work to earn *your* money! Be willing to pay *yourself* off before anybody else and I'll show you how you can not only *keep up* with the Joneses. Brother, you can get *way ahead* of them!"

Kent turned it off. He felt like he

needed a stiff drink. But there was one consolation. Germain had proof that it was an outside influence. It was not spontaneous on the part of the people, themselves.

He clenched his good fist, "Who the hell—" he started to growl.

Suddenly, Germain opened the bedroom door and came out. His face was inscrutable, as usual, but Kent could read him by his attitude. It was very tense. His extra sensory perception had discovered something.

"What did you get?" he asked.

"The next U.N. session won't take up until next Monday, will it?"

"No, but—"

"That gives us four days. Let's go to Agarthi."

"It's a good thing we brought our own transportation," said Kent, remembering their much photographed space commuter out at Idle Wilde.

"This is that time of great danger of which the King of the World warned me before he rejoined the Elder Race. But he also said—"

"Yes?"

"He also said that when the time comes I would discover powers that I did not know I possessed." Germain looked at Kent intently. "May God help me to find those powers soon!"

This unexpected change of plans at least served to confuse Pavlovich. Twelve hours later, when in position to attack, he found that his quarry had left New York, and that he had returned to Agarthi . . .

A GARTHI City had been built in the heart of Amnyi Machen, a towering peak that rivaled Everest. It had been built fifty milleniums before by the Elder Race.

Lillian Germain, in spite of the fourteen thousand foot altitude of the cavern city, was warm and comfortable in her sunsuit as she stood that day in her garden and looked out over the flowered walls across the tops of low, marble white buildings and at the distant palace where the King of the World had once ruled for two thousand years of time.

A warm glow of thankfulness suffused her being as she looked up at the glowing ball of energy that the ancient interstellar founders had hung there to produce non-radioactive sunlight. In Agarthi, life was prolonged, and in her present state of happiness she never wanted it to end. The dangers were past, she told herself, and the future stretched boundlessly before her in breathtaking, rosy vistas.

She was waiting for her husband to join her. Now that Agarthi had relinquished Earth Government into the hands of Terra's ordinary citizens, Stephen's terrible responsibility would be diminished.

At this thought she had to laugh. Diminished? That which was left as his responsibility still entailed the whole future of a solar system. Now he would be launching on a program to establish an interplanetary government. She suddenly resented the vastness of this perspective, because

recently she had become aware of another future responsibility which was very small and personal, but which was as important as all the solar systems in the universe.

She was waiting to tell her husband the well known precious little secret, that she was going to—

“Hello, beautiful!”

Before she could turn voluntarily, she was in his arms, and she was necessarily speechless for a full quarter minute by reason of the unhusbandlike kiss he planted on her lips.

“Sorry I’ve been neglecting you for the past ten thousand years,” said Germain, laughing at her confusion. “It seems I’ve been busy at the ‘office,’ darling.”

“I’m glad the U.N. gave you a breather till next Monday,” she said, “even if it was caused by that old stinker of a Gormski. Did Michael come with you?” She had always referred to their mutual friend, Kent, by his first name.

For a moment, Germain had a keen but distant look in his eyes. “He’ll be here. I had to send him on a special mission.”

Lillian looked deep into her husband’s black, far-seeing eyes, still trying to comprehend the magnitude of the mutant brain that lay behind them, the brain on which the distant Elder Race confidently depended—because as a parting gift they had refined Borg’s surgery, adding a few improvements of their own. In the knowledge of his power she found

comfort and protection, and at the same time she was delighted, as only a woman can be, in the fact that he was in every other way a normal, well-balanced human being and the intimate companion of her life.

“You can’t fool me,” she told him. “You’re worried about something. What is it?”

Germain’s face became a stony mask. “Just worries one must expect in my position. It’s the old financial situation,” he lied. “Now that we are functioning in connection with the outside world our economy must be balanced. To have money, we need a source of credit—like natural resources. Agarathi hasn’t any natural resources.”

“What about Steve Rockner’s gold mine in the Gobi? You’ve been working that. Agarathi now has the rights.”

“Chicken feed. So is the fifty million a year contract with the United Nations to hand out interstellar science to terrestrial governments. We need other resources, Lil. If it weren’t for our secret allies, the Lunar Interstellars, and Janice’s treasure—”

All this was connected with previous adventures. A lost colony of benevolent interstellar people had taken refuge inside the moon, ages before, when they learned that Earth was the property of long established malignant interstellar forces. These hidden Lunar allies had suddenly taken a hand in Agarathi’s struggles to free the Earth of its secret op-

pressors. Also, a certain incredible treasure, believed by some to be the legendary treasure of the Nibelungs, had been uncovered in the hiding place of the deposed controllers of Earth and had been given into the hands of the Lunar Interstellars for safe keeping. Agarthi dipped into this on infrequent occasions, but it was difficult to market in the outer world the jewelry of ancient supermen manufactured on some planet of an alien solar system millenia before the dawn of modern terrestrial history—especially considering that it had been designed for a race of giants!

"How would you like to go on a little vacation trip?" Germain asked Lillian, suddenly.

"Where to, my love?" she said, gayly.

"Oh, somewhere local. Say Jupiter or Saturn."

"What!" Her blue-green eyes widened under arched brows.

"Sure! I'm not kidding you, Lil. If I'm going to set up a solar government I've got to make some inspection tours. Mars comes first, of course, but there may be danger there, so we'll let the Golden Guardsmen comb that area for the time being. In the meantime, I want to snoop around farther afield. Care to come along?"

"Oh Stephen! I wish you didn't have so many responsibilities!" she exclaimed. "Even with your capacities it's such a burden to carry!"

"Wait a minute!" he laughed.

"You forget I have some able assistants. There are all the thousands of Agarthians, headed by Mandir, who are working out the proposed mechanics of the whole Solar Government. Kent is my go-between and Agarthi's representative at the United Nations. Borg and Grange are working on universal industrialization and applications of Universal Power, as well as systems of defense against any possible raids by interstellars. And Rocky is going great guns with the Golden Guardsmen, aided by Stierman, Turner and Brion. What else could I ask for?"

"I know, but—"

"No buts about it," he interrupted. "We're going on that cruise!"

"How long would we be gone?"

"Five months, maybe eight or nine. Who knows? We may find something interesting."

"As interesting as a junior mutant?" she asked.

Germain's facial expression, or general lack of it, was in keeping with his Indian physiognomy. His Sioux Indian blood was predominant when it came to showing visibly anything he felt deeply. But in that moment his lower lip quivered.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"What do you think I mean, dummy? In a few months I don't think I'd better be skylarking around Jupiter."

Germain's dark brows went up. "Lil!" he cried. "You don't mean—"

She laughed and ruffled his hair. "You males are all alike! You all go

into the same routine. *Of course* I mean it! We're going to have a blessed event!"

Sudden joy changed to dark concern. Germain took her by both arms. "Are you all right?" he asked.

Again she laughed at him. "That's another part of the old line," she teased. "Oh Stephen, you're not at all different from any other man!" Then, very quietly, she came into his arms and said, "I'm glad of *that!*"

Germain looked at her expressionlessly. He was weighing her last remark, remembering that she had once feared his mutant brain. Now, thank God, he thought, he was no longer a mental monstrosity to her.

"Stephen!" she suddenly exclaimed, while her complexion turned a delicate pink. Her eyes widened and her lips parted.

"What is it, Lil?"

For answer, she snuggled very close, gratefully. "You're so kind," she said. "So thoughtful."

"What did I do?"

"You knew all the time you were going to be a daddy and you kept quiet about it so that I'd have the pleasure of telling you!"

He knew what she meant. His extra-sensory perception had enabled him only last month to detect a small kidney stone in Dr. Borg, which was dissolved by proper treatment. Yes, he could have known about the baby . . .

He caught her chin and lifted her face until she looked into his eyes.

"I could have known, Lil. But—long ago I decided many things about this abnormality of mine. One of those things was that I had to recognize you as a woman as well as my wife, and that as such you are entitled to—"

She beamed at him, appreciatively. "So you trained yourself to leave me some secrets of my own," she concluded for him. "I told you you were considerate."

"But now I'm going to look into you—into that little head of yours. I see your micro-telaug is still secure." Lillian had one, as did Janice Maine, Steve Rockner, Michael Kent and a handful of other Agarthians. "Is it working all right?"

By way of reply, she concentrated confidently, hurling at him a paralysis beam that would have incapacitated a dozen ordinary men. He closed his eyes for a moment, then he smiled in a reassured sort of way and took her chin again in his hands.

"Just be on the alert, darling. If anything happened to you—"

"Stephen, you don't have some secret information, do you?" She swiftly utilized another feature of the micro-telaug and probed his mind, knowing full well, however, that he could wall off his thoughts at will. Just before he did shut her out, she caught a shadowy glimpse of physically invisible space ships manned by— She could not quite make it out, but whatever manned the ships was not human.

"What are they?" she gasped.

"And *where* are they?"

"We've just detected them close by in outer space, about fifty thousand miles," he confessed. "Guess you might as well know as Janice or Rocky would spring it on you sooner or later. They're very advanced aliens, Lil. I tried to reach them with ESP, but they have no minds, at least not what you'd think."

"No minds!"

"They're robots."

"Oh Stephen! You must be mistaken!"

"No, Lil, although whether or not they are the instruments of living intelligences remains to be seen."

She stamped her foot and clenched her fists, then bit her lip and turned away from him. He pulled her around to him and saw tears flooding into her eyes.

"Does it have to go on forever?" she pleaded. "The Universe must have been created for a higher purpose than for this carnivorous cycle of dog eat dog! When will there ever be such a thing as peace and security! When life was simple, the stars were impossibly remote, Stephen. Now that the stars seem to be within our grasp at last, life's simplicity has receded into astronomical remoteness. I *hate* this!"

"Lil, honey, I've taught you the Fundamental Law. Creation depends upon the giant swing of the pendulum between construction and destruction. It's the struggle between the extremes that counts. That's

what makes existence. Perfection is the end of existence. By that I mean the *death* of existence. There must be evil to overcome. In that struggle the victor rises to higher stages of development, ad infinitum. We can only hope that it will continue to be our kind that ascends that ever expanding spiral."

She realized slightly but did not smile. She kissed him and said, "I am beginning to see why the proposed vacation trip. Actually, you wanted me out of harm's way if Terra is going to be attacked, and at the same time you want to be out behind the enemy so as to find a soft spot and perhaps direct the Golden Guardsmen at the same time. And maybe be in a position to make a run for it to contact the Elder Race again if you need their help."

"I see my mind gets more undressed than yours," Germain grinned. Then the grin faded abruptly and he added, "But this time there'll be no running to the Elder Race. We're on our own!"

JANICE Maine was also very much contented with her lot in Agarathi. Formerly a highly trained scientist and spy working against Agarathi, her love for big Steve Rockner had led her on a devious trail back to it, and she had become its loyal ally, as well as Rocky's wife.

She looked about her, drinking in all the peace and pleasure that her senses could bring her in the quiet

swimming pool enclosure. The vine-clad, circular wall enclosed the ancient pool, on the surface of which lily pads glistened in stationary repose, like green silk, amongst the pinkish white splashes of color provided by the lilies, themselves. Grass grew between rocks along the water's edge, and in some places blue columbines and gorgeous bird-of-paradise flowers tried to dip their faces in the water. Above, great trees sprayed their leafy branches across the cavern's "sky." Birds imported from many lands thrived in Agarthi's scientifically balanced climate, and Janice had accustomed herself to the sight of ruby-throated humming birds vying for attention together with keeled toucans and king birds of paradise. Even as she looked above her now she saw two java sparrows which she could call by name and they would come to her if she willed it, to be fed tidbits from her hands.

She lay on a bench of imperishable metal, supported by cushions, her coppery hair drying from her recent swim. And she smiled, pensively.

She was simultaneously thankful for and amused at her present unsophisticated reactions whereas a short time ago she had approached this place with the cold, steely mind of an automaton, an international spy for the enemies of Agarthi. But, as in the case of Dr. Borg, who had previously served the Russian dictator, Nicholas, Agarthi had won,

and her whole life was dedicated to its purposes—and to Rocky.

As she lay daydreaming on the bench she was unaware of an unusual intruder. It was a two man space ship, such as were used by Agarthians or the Golden Guardsmen as commuter vessels between their interplanetary dreadnaughts.

But this particular vessel had the peculiarity of only being one foot in length . . .

It landed on the moss grown stones near the pool's edge, within ten feet of her. A miniature door opened, and a tiny figure clad in a space suit emerged. Its head was enclosed in a transparent metal globe on top of which were several diminutive electronic devices. Quickly, the Lilliputian figure walked toward Janice.

Janice stirred, turned on her side, and looked dreamily toward the pool, thus bringing the intruder and his ship directly into her line of vision. But in the same instant the figure and the ship vanished. They were both completely invisible.

Then, suddenly, a purplish globe of light began to grow beside Janice, and she sprang to her feet. In an instant her micro-telaug was in action, hurling a paralysis beam at the globe of light. But to no avail. It kept on growing.

And then a mental voice, transmitted also by micro-telaug, reached her mind:

Boy, what a boon to suppressed husbands these gadgets are! No

more sneaking in the back way, shoes in hand, no kicking over milk-bottles in the dark! You come in the front door, invisible or otherwise, but impervious to rolling pins, cusswords and poisonous thoughts. All you say is darling!— take me as I am! And if you really do have to spend a night in the dog house, you can shrink down to a size where you can get into the darned thing without shoving Fido out into the cold. With these things marriage becomes a tolerable institution for trapped husbands!

Janice bit her lip, half angry at herself for being fooled, half angry at the intruder for his deception. "Rocky!" she exclaimed. "If you do that again I'll paralyze you for a month! I'll short-circuit your carrier beam and skin you alive!"

The purplish light vanished, and Steve Rockner, in full space operation uniform of the Golden Guardsmen, stood before her grinning exultantly. He unfastened his globular helmet and placed it on the ground.

"Oh you big ape!" Janice exclaimed. She came willingly into his arms.

After a long, satisfying moment, she stood back to look at him. "What are you in uniform for? Are you that close to action?"

"Pretty close," he said, brushing back the flaming mop of his red hair. "You coming with me or are you joining Germain and Lillian?"

A troubled shadow passed over her face. "I was kidding you about

the action," she said. "For a moment I had forgotten about the alert warning. Do you really think anybody would dare invade Terra now, with our new defenses?"

Rocky shrugged. "We're still babes in the woods," he said. "We're plenty advanced, technologically, but we lack experience. They can have one thing we haven't and we're in for trouble."

At that precise moment, an alarm was transmitted to them from Agarthi's central laboratories, over the VHF carriers that activated their micro-telaugs.

Council call. This is an emergency. Assemble immediately.

Janice looked at Rocky, tensely alert. But engraved in her mind in that moment was the image of the pool enclosure where they were. Was this perfect peace to be shattered by a war of the worlds?

Rocky squinted his brown eyes, as though listening for more. In his mind was a vision of the Golden Guardsmen fleet, superman battle-ships packed with Elder Race weapons and Universal Power, each one of them a quarter mile colossus of destruction. Then he looked at Janice, at once grim and jubilant.

"Maybe this is it!" he exclaimed. "Let's go!"

He reached down, replaced his helmet, and drew Janice to him. They were both engulfed in the purplish rays of the relative densifier, and in a moment two diminutive figures raced toward the tiny flier.

When they had entered it and closed the door, it took off with a seeming instantaneity that startled a raucous cry out of the birds in the trees . . .

THE Chamber of Agarthian Elders looked very much like a Senate chamber. A central proscenium with a speaker's rostrum, and a superior rostrum above made of white onyx, two dozen or more plush seats for the Elders arranged in a half moon below, and another half moon section of seats for an audience of neophytes who had not yet become Elders of the Council. Around the walls were mezzanines for the listening Agarthian citizenry.

Stephen Germain sat in a great chair behind the white onyx rostrum. In such a position he automatically represented its former occupant, who had used it for two milleniums of time. Now Germain was the Star Warden of the solar system.

In the inferior chair, behind the second rostrum below, sat thousand year old Mandir, chief of Agarthian Elders. Before him, in the Elders' section, sat the true Agarthian Elders whose average age topped four hundred years.

In the neophyte section sat younger Agarthians in their neophyte robes emblazoned on the back with the famous Sword of Agarthi. Among them sat Earthmen from the outside world who had been admitted to the ranks of the neophytes and had passed the psychic tests and con-

ditionings connected with the Journey through Seven Towers—a mental experience that could overwhelm anyone in the lower I.Q.s but which left the surviving students strengthened by a brand new perspective of all history, philosophy, religion and science, the four walls forming the room in which Man lives. The Journey of Seven Towers had made those walls transparent to the successful neophytes, giving them vistas of the Infinite.

There was Steve Rockner, his space suit removed, revealing the golden uniform of the Guardsmen and his Fleet Admiral's insignia. Beside him sat Janice Maine, her sunsuit concealed by the pastel-shaded street robe common to Agarthian women. Next to her was Lillian Germain, her raven black hair contrasting strikingly with Janice's coppery coiffure. And there was statuesque, ivory-skinned Ingaborg with her nordic blue eyes and white-golden braids, sitting beside David of Ravenoe, also blond and blue-eyed, a chivalric atavism, the cut of his long hair, the set of his jaw and the square of his massive chest reminiscent of the days of King Arthur and the Round Table.

Back of Rockner were the commanding officers of the Golden Guardsmen, among them such outlanders as Greg "Baby Face" Stierman, formerly the Chief of the U.S. FBI, his previous aide, Sam Turner, and former U.S. Lieutenant Colonel George Henry Brion of the O.S.S.

Beside them sat the humped, wizened little Russian scientist, Dr. Julius Borg, inventor of Energy Serum, discoverer of relative densification, and the creator of the new Stephen Germain. Beside him was his new found intellectual companion and colleague in superscience, "Little Willy," alias James William Grange, D.S., Ph.D., former technical aide to the O.S.S.

Germain addressed all of them without preamble:

"You have been called together here in emergency session because we are in imminent danger of attack by a very advanced alien force. I will call on certain members of this audience to report their findings. Dr. Borg, will you please report?"

Borg rose laboriously to his feet, a shrunken man with a large, grizzled head, a pock-marked face and a clay-like complexion. Iron-gray hair, short-clipped, stuck out on his head like the bristles of a brush. Whenever he tried to smile, as he did now, it resulted in a toothy snarl, which was recognized only by those who knew him for what it really was. But his looks did not matter nearly as much as his colossal intellect. His words carried great weight with the Agarthians.

"With the aid of Mr. Germain's extra-sensory perception," he said, "and with the help of certain new apparatus developed by Dr. Grange and myself, which produces a second order type of radiant energy, we have detected the enemy. Also, I must give credit to our friends and allies,

the Lunar Interstellars, who have detected signs of the enemy simultaneously with us.

"The invasion force consists of large, extremely fast ships presently stationed some fifty thousand miles out in space. We have counted a hundred of them, although to radar they are invisible."

This statement caused a slight flurry of excitement among the outlanders and the Agarthian neophytes, but the Elders remained calm. All of them were weighing against this announcement the fact that the Agarthian old line fleet consisted of only twenty-five space battleships, that the Golden Guardsmen had a hundred ships, and that "Terrestrial Government" was building about fifty more, of inferior armament. Besides that, there were about a hundred and sixty interstellar vessels belonging to the Lunar Interstellars. Beyond that—nothing, except Universal Power, which was in its infancy. This was perhaps a margin of safety, but its extent depended on the nature of the enemy.

Then Borg hit them hard. "These alien ships are manned by robots," he said. Before a rising tide of startled comments could engulf him, he continued. "The robots appear to be guided by an elusive intelligence that may in some way be connected with the so-called flying saucers."

Young David of Ravenoe, who was better in battle than in a council chamber, stood up to raise an objection. In his new found affection

for Ingaborg he had been mentally star-gathering and was not up to date with recent developments.

"That's inconceivable," he said. "What can we possibly know about the flying saucers?"

"Plenty," said Borg, snarling affably at his questioner. "Perhaps my colleague, Dr. Grange, could enlighten you. It is extremely *apropos* of the subject under discussion."

While David sat down, to get his arm pinched by Ingaborg in rebuke for his irrepressibility, the slim, dapper figure of "Little Willy" Grange rose to take the floor. He stroked one side of his thin nose, characteristically, and began.

"You have all become acquainted with studies in sub-nuclear physics," he said. "This branch of science has investigated the nature of a type of sub-matter composed of, not protons and electrons, but *protinos* and *electrinos*, some eighteen hundred times smaller than their equivalents in gross matter. The hypothesis that this second order of matter might constitute the substance of the so-called ether and be the carrier medium for magnetic energy as well as other wave phenomena has now developed into strongly substantiated theory. In fact, sub-matter may be the actual substance of *the next plane of existence*." Grange smiled at the reaction of his audience, but went on. "We're getting into deep water, but we've got to, because the flying saucers are either the denizens of the sub-material world or they

are a hybrid substance caught half-way between—the key, you might say, to the world of secondary phenomena. Sometimes they are invisible, and at other times they appear like an ectoplasmic materialization, reflecting primary orders of waves such as light like so many ephemeral bubbles.

"They have long been a mystery, but our investigations have revealed that they are attracted to any source of atomic energy, as though hard radiation in gross matter accompanied secondary type releases of energy upon which they seem to feed. Or at least they are attracted, for some reason. They also have something to do with magnetic forces and have been observed to become confused when confronted with various magnetic fault zones which exist on this planet.

"So Dr. Borg and I devised a trap. I won't go into detail except to say that it required an atomic pile and a newly developed and I might say quite dangerous type of intermittently cross-magnetizing cyclotron, together with certain apparatus connected directly with secondary wave phenomena. To make a long story short, we did trap a flying saucer, just three days ago, and managed to hold it imprisoned long enough to make satisfactory observations. What we found corroborates Mr. Germain's contentions, that the discs are living, sentient creatures!"

The hubbub that ensued brought dozens of people to their feet, par-

ticularly the Agarthians in the galleries. But the ensuing discussions brought out the fact that the advent of the aliens in outer space had brought an unprecedented occurrence of flying saucer phenomena in earthly skies. Germain announced that he had detected a high order of mentality in the discs, and that he had sensed in some way he could not describe in words that movements of the alien fleet manned by robots bore a positive relationship with movements of the flying discs. He said that it was of prime importance to continue an investigation into their nature.

Old Mandir reported on strange occurrences in Europe which led him to believe that some elements of the enemy had already infiltrated into terrestrial civilization. There had been significant disappearances of important prisoners of the previous war, including Dr. Gerhardt Eidelmann, who had adapted captured Elder Race equipment to the purposes of the forces opposing Agarthi. His stature as a research physicist was practically equal to that of Borg's. A mysterious force was beginning to stir in the world, and Agarthi prepared its battle armor.

Plans were outlined as the day wore on. Elder Race machinery was to be set up throughout the world in hopes of ferreting out the nefarious influences they feared. War ray batteries in strategic zones were being converted as rapidly as possible to the use of Universal Power, in

order to cover major cities with what they hoped would be impenetrable defenses even against interstellar hordes. Space fleets were to be converted to faster drive, also using Universal Power.

Then came Rocky's assignment.

"Admiral Rockner," said Germain, "you will assume active battle command of the Golden Guardsman fleet immediately. You will enter space at a point opposite to the enemy position and pursue a course around them, reaching Mars in such a way as to avoid all possible contact with the unknown fleet. This is not sparing you the possibility of a major engagement, inasmuch as I have been warned in the past by the Elder Race that this present trouble would someday originate in the area of Mars, and therefore it may be assumed that your probing of the Martian defenses to discover the nature of the enemy's home base may require your heavy armaments more than they will be required in this area. You are to use your own judgment in regard to attack, within limits. If you are not able to determine adequately the nature of the enemy and his powers to retaliate, you are to report to us through Mandir and await further instructions."

Rocky turned to Janice, grinning from ear to ear. He had always loved a good fight, not because he was belligerent but more or less on a sportsmanship basis. It was the challenge to his interest that he respond-

ed to most readily, outside of the lovelight in Janice's eyes.

"I'm the battle chief, it seems," he said to her, "and I've got the men and equipment. You've got the scientific know-how. Besides that you're my wife and not to be pampered. Want to come along?"

Janice pretended to snicker. "Benevolent, aren't you? You know you couldn't ever get away with leaving me behind—you big ape!"

"Sir, to you—lieutenant!"

Her blue-green eyes blazed narrowly. "Now look here, Rocky! If you think for one minute that I—"

"Okay! Okay!" he exclaimed. "But this is no honeymoon. There's a war on, you know."

David, Ingaborg and Lillian Germain had gathered around them. David was a Commander in the Golden Guardsman organization.

"I believe," said Rocky, to the latter, "you are on special commission?"

"Yes," said David. "Germain and I and Ingaborg and Lillian—"

"Not Lillian," said Germain, joining them. "On second thought, she stays here. But my special mission still stands. We're going exploring. I'm taking my own ship, the *Nova*. There'll be a full crew." He was referring to an ancient vessel originally constructed by the Elder Race, itself, and which had been the private ship of the King of the World, a titanic dreadnaught built for giants, almost a mile in diameter and now brimming with specialized equipment

and Universal Power batteries capable of lighting all the cities of the Earth simultaneously.

"But what about Lil?" objected Ingaborg, putting her arm affectionately about Lillian's waist.

Just then an Agarthian technician confronted them, addressing Germain. "There has been some strange interference, sir. The master telaug controls show a blowout somewhere. Somebody's micro-telaug has been burned out."

Germain's deeply tanned face was impassive, except for a slight lowering of his brows over dark, glittering eyes. "The enemy," he said, "is stronger than I thought. Moreover, he is in our midst."

"What do you mean?" queried David, as Dr. Borg hobbled up.

"I mean," said Germain, "that one among us who possesses the micro-telaug now is no longer one of us. That person, whoever he may be, is masquerading as an Agarthian or a Terrestrial, but he is—what shall I say? An *alien*. However, now that he is aware of our cognizance he is no doubt clever enough to conceal himself and the present crisis does not leave us sufficient time for a laboratory controlled investigation. I suggest that we allow the alien to reveal himself by his own actions."

They all looked at each other. Germain and Julius Borg remained expressionless.

"Stephen," said Lillian, "I don't like the idea of being left behind—now."

Germain pressed her arm tenderly. "An old friend of ours is going to take you under his wing," he said. "In your condition you've got to—"

"You mean—Michael?" Lillian's eyes suddenly lighted with pleasure. "Is he back from that special mission of yours?"

"Something tells me he is. Let's go find him."

So Germain and Lillian went out of the Council Chamber to meet their oldest, most trusted friend, Michael Kent, a man who had grown up with them, loving Lillian competitively with Germain and ultimately coming to love them both more than each alone. He was their most intimate mutual friend and ally . . .

Behind them, Dr. Grange remarked to Dr. Borg, "There are only a dozen micro-telaugs in operation. We ought to be able to run a check on each one."

Borg was looking at Germain's departing figure. "I suspect there won't be time," he answered. "Not now."

"What do you mean? It would only take a half hour at the most. Surely the danger isn't as imminent as all that."

And Rocky added, "Germain doesn't seem to be *that* worried."

Borg snarled in a friendly way. "That's when he's *really* worried. Right now I'll bet his ESP is spread thin from here to the alien fleet. What do you think he's holding onto Lillian's arm like that for? Mentally,

he's walking on a glass tightrope, expecting it to break any second."

"I think I'd better round up my boys," said Rocky, referring casually to ten thousand of the most highly trained and specialized fighting men in the known history of the world.

Janice went out with him.

Borg turned to Grange. "We'd better take our places in the war labs . . ."

MICHAEL Kent appeared to Lillian in the ante-chamber like a dear portrait out of an old trunk, brown eyes, curly brown hair, pipe and all. It was reassuring to her, carrying her back to her childhood.

"Michael," she said, kissing his cheek, "you're a sight for sore eyes! Here we are in the middle of a nightmare of unrealities and uncertainties and you pop up as real and reliable as— as grandmother's teapot!"

Kent shrugged significantly at Germain. "How do you like that? So now I'm nothing but an old pot!"

"Have you looked over the lab?" asked Germain, expressionlessly as usual.

"It's such a fortress it scares me even when I know you're on my side," Kent answered. "She'll be safe there if anywhere on the planet. I don't see how anything could touch her there."

"Is Yvonne there?" Yvonne was Kent's younger sister.

"On the job. Every time she reads that mental tape of yours she goes around like a somnambulist, a superscientist not knowing a damn thing about what she's doing. It's kind of weird, as though she were a split personality."

Lillian frowned. "Do I have to weather this storm cooped up in that superman's castle?" she complained, referring to a specialized laboratory Germain had built atop the Pacific island of Guam, with the permission of the U.S. Government. Why he had built it he had explained to no one except the Elder People who had left with him alone certain equipment which they could entrust to no one else, and there he had worked with mysteries for which human speech had not yet found words.

"Well, there is more than ourselves to consider, Lil," he answered her.

She blushed, unable to argue back.

Both Kent and Germain were in a hurry, pressed by the gathering storm of events that involved more than the safety of Terra, itself. But Germain took him aside and talked with him.

Which was an excuse for having the chance to examine him, internally. As he talked casually, his extra-sensory perception was inspecting the other's micro-telaug. It appeared to be in perfect condition. He probed the other's mind and found nothing out of the ordinary, other than an honest anxiety for his friends and for civilization as a whole—plus a

grim anticipation of the lesson that the present emergency was going to give to the U.N. and one Mr. Gormski.

"Something is bothering you," said Kent, eyeing his friend closely.

Germain laughed. "A lot of things are bothering me."

"I mean—something about me."

"No, but I *am* bothered by a presentiment that, well—something is escaping my attention that shouldn't."

"*That* is bad. I'd be afraid of anything that could escape *your* attention."

"That's just the point! It's there, somewhere, like the missing piece in a puzzle. And I'm looking for it because something tells me it's the most dangerous link in this whole mess."

"You know," said Kent, "the outside world still knows nothing about what's hanging over their heads. Aren't you going to warn them at all?"

A slight smirk shadowed one corner of Germain's mouth. "Their super radar screens can pick up every meteor between here and Luna, so what the screens won't pick up would be unbelievable to them. They would laugh, accuse me of hoaxing or having hallucinations. They might even make me mad, and as one of the Agarthian Elders I'm supposed to be the master of my emotions—but sometimes I feel like going on a scalping party." He grinned as he always did when joking about his

Indian blood, which was actually a throw-back to a Sioux woman three generations removed. "Seriously, though, my main fear is that they might actually believe me and go off half-cocked in their shiny new space navy, and that would be curtains. It would be just as well if they believed this whole thing was a hoax until we get a grip on the situation. Their crews are uninitiated. They'd be liable to commit suicide if they took it upon themselves to meet the enemy once they were aware of him. If they do get the news, try to convince them when you get back to the U.N. Monday that they must accept our guidance. Give them every proof you can. Try to hold them to the Emergency Clause of the Charter. They must follow Agarthi's command or they'll get their fingers singed off up to the arm pits."

"Well, I'd better be getting Lil out of here then," said Kent. "I think I can make it back to Guam in about three hours."

"Take good care of her," said Germain, extending his hand.

And to his wife, in an adjacent room of the palace, he said, with sheer telepathy, unaided by microtelaug: *This is not goodbye, dearest, I'll be with you.*

Lillian Germain could believe that. She knew her husband.

But neither of them knew Izdran of a Thousand Lives . . .

ORDINARILY, Lillian would have expected of her husband

that he say goodbye to her personally, but Germain knew she would understand by this very omission that the circumstances were far from ordinary. She would ask no questions and go with Kent. His reason for getting her away from his presence would probably be obvious to her, too, he thought, but he couldn't help that. The fact was, he expected any second to be attacked personally by the alien or his agents. Logic told him that without any ESP. He was the Star Warden here.

As soon as Kent left him he made a dash for Mandir's chamber of meditation. He knew the old man had gone there, but more than Mandir he needed the chamber, itself. It was sound proof and telaug proof, which meant that even the extraneous thoughts of others could not penetrate here, nor could augmented psychic influences get in. Moreover, lighting effects and acoustics there could minimize the bio-chemical interference of conscious thought and leave the subconscious unhampered for controlled operation.

The gray headed old mentalist lost a slight fraction of his practised composure as Germain dashed in without warning.

"I have sensed the existence of a very grave emergency," he said to the younger man, "and your presence here is proof enough. What is it, Stephen?"

"Very little time to talk," retorted Germain. "I seem to be the focus of an attack. Get to Borg and Grange

and have them work out that secondary interference screen. I am staying here."

"Just as you say," said Mandir, quietly. "But I shall retire immediately to the King's old chambers and join forces with you, if this attack is to be mental. It's too bad the psychic ray has not been remounted. Perhaps we could—"

"It's more than mental," said Germain. "Think of—of—"

"Yes?"

"Of ectoplasm—not just the supernatural idea, but a substance which is a concentration of sub-matter, a physical manifestation. Much that is about to happen is totally new to our experience." Germain, like Izdran, was equipped with the seventh sense which, unlike the intuitive "sixth sense" (ESP), gave him within a limited degree an actual fourth coordinate perspective.

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Mandir.

"Add something new, myself. You have delved into auto-synthesis or *faith* power, haven't you? Not the religious sense of blind faith, but the basic, metaphysical nature of faith. One of its manifestations is levitation."

"Yes," said Mandir, his dim eyes beginning to glimmer with academic interest. "Twice I achieved levitation. The King did it easily. What are you getting at?"

"Faith power is based on the fact that any given set of results arises from a given set of causes and that,

conversely, if the mind can perceive as an absolute reality a synthesized set of results for which there was no original cause, that *cause* will come into being in order to match the results. In other words, if I could perceive strongly enough the result of my being transported elsewhere, the cause of that transportation would have to come into being in order to match that result. In short, what I am after and have been close to achieving is mental teleportation. I am going to have to perfect it now. So leave me here and contact Borg and Grange at once."

IN substantiation of Germain's pre-sentiments, an astounding circumstance developed in the city of Agarthi. Without other than Germain's own warning, a medium sized, disc-shaped space ship materialized before the palace.

It was approximately one hundred feet in diameter, and twenty feet thick. It was smooth surfaced, without rocket tubes or fins or observation blisters. It hung suspended in space for a moment, and then it settled quickly to the ground.

Immediately, Agarthian defenses went to work on it. Disintegrators came first, with no effect. Sonic heat and death rays were equally futile. Telaúg beams could not penetrate its psychic screens. But the television beams brought back to all operators the spectacle of ten, three-eyed robots working at the command of an ordinary Terrestrial. The latter was

a big man with bushy eyebrows and a thick, slavic physiognomy.

This is a projection from outer space, came Germain's thought to Telaug Control. But it is no mere image. It is physical, a sub-order materialization, and it can do damage. I am asking the laboratory to locate the source of the projection, which will be invisible to all primary waves. Attack on the secondary level. All primary energy will be useless against the attacker until you scramble his second order screen.

An attempt was made to contact Germain further, but he threw up around his chamber a shield which nothing seemed to be able to penetrate. He and Borg knew something immediately which the rest did not. Borg, Germain, Lillian and Kent were the four who knew that man on board the alien ship, but Lillian and Kent were gone from Agarthi. Germain and Borg had glimpsed him briefly as the televisibeam image was relayed over the micro-telaug carriers.

The man was Sergeyev Pavlovich. Germain and Borg had assumed him to be dead, for they knew that when he escaped from Terra in the ship conceived of by Germain the Elder People had set a trap of death for him and Nicholas and the rest on board. By some unimaginable piece of luck, Pavlovich had escaped—but then Germain's seventh sense had not been so sharp in those days.

But if Pavlovich had returned, it was highly possible that Nicholas,

also, had come back. Both Borg and Germain shuddered at the thought of the mad dictator returning to Terra armed with the superman technology of an alien world—no doubt Mars. This would explain strange occurrences in Europe, particularly the disappearance of Gerhard Eidemann.

Eidemann! A tremendous scientist who once adapted Elder Race weapons to the purposes of the detrimental interstellars! What would be a more logical move on Nicholas' part than to acquire Eidemann?

That combination was bad enough, both men thought, simultaneously, but there was more. Whoever was behind Nicholas with this alien technology had a stake in Terra also. There would be an alien master mind, as well. And where was *he*?

Germain thought of the telaug operator who had reported one micro-telaug blown out. They had not had time to inspect all possessors of the micro-telaug. Yet one of those people was now a mere mask for the *alien*.

For one brief moment, Germain was an ordinary human being. He was envious of the world beyond Agarthi, where life went on undisturbed, as yet, by the tremendous influences being brought to bear on its destiny. Regardless of adverse world opinion, the responsibility for the world was here on his own shoulders, and he was not any too certain of the outcome, inasmuch as his seventh sense perspective of the

future was only based on probabilities, and these swirled before him indefinitely. In spite of his mutant mentality he was only a neo-interstellar being—far from being a god.

And in the midst of it all, a personal enmity. Pavlovich. He had locked arms with Pavlovich in physical conflict. Indirectly, he had defeated the man, disgraced him, destroyed his every hope. Pavlovich hated him. Nicholas' strategy again was obvious. He had sent the big Russian on a suicide venture to obliterate him and remove one big obstacle from his goal of world conquest.

WHILE Borg and Germain entertained these thoughts and the Agarthian garrison stood at bay, the alien ship opened. Out of an airlock marched the semi-tangible sub-order images of five robots. The airlock closed behind them and they proceeded into the palace.

A platoon of palace guards confronted them, firing at the weird materializations with cruder, more physical weapons than previously. This time they used explosive bullets, and for a moment it seemed that there would be some effect produced on the intruders. Two of the robot forms wavered, quivering like an image out of focus, or stricken with interference. One of them collapsed into nothingness.

But then the invaders used a new weapon. It was not physical paralysis, but mental. Telaug Control blew

half out of commission trying to protect the victims. The telepathic robots paralyzed the minds of the defenders, seemingly possessed of an inexhaustible source of power from somewhere. The third eyes of the remaining four automatons blazed with this alien energy as they continued toward their goal into the interior of the palace, while Borg and Grange worked rapidly, in grim, silent accord, deep below in the tremendous interstellar laboratory that the Elder Race had left at their disposal. They knew they were racing against the slimmest margin of time, for the advantage was all on the side of the enemy.

The Agarthian defenders next made the mistake of trying to grapple physically with the robots, only to find that their substance could thin out or densify almost into the semblance of gross matter, and many there were who fell dead with broken necks or crushed skulls at the hands of the inhumanly powerful robots. And the worst development of that encounter was that the robots acquired disintegrators from the defenders. With these they marched on Germain, himself.

Telaug Control, Mandir, and perhaps Borg were aware of a few lightning swift tests Germain had made. Releasing his screens for a fraction of a second, he had probed the robots with enough lethal psychic power to kill a platoon of them if they had been human. But he had found no response there, no

effect. If there was mentality there it was of a different order, or *frequency*! He shot that clue to Borg and then closed his screens quickly. That word *frequency* was a clue for Borg and Grange, but there was pitifully little time to work on it.

In the meantime, Steve Rockner sprang into action with two of his ships. He had seen the effect of explosions upon the images. He had seen the effect of the counter-weapon—psychic paralysis. He knew his ships were equipped with psychic screens as well as a battery of the worlds most specialized weapons.

The two dreadnaughts, densified to mere, ten foot miniatures but packing an irresistible power in terms of mass and momentum, simply peeled off out of the cavern's "sky" and plowed through the materialization of the alien ship.

The image went out like a bubble, but to the chagrin of all watchers the four robots remained inside the palace. Then the ship image reappeared before the palace, rematerializing as if nothing had happened.

Borg telauged to Rocky over a secret carrier that was keyed to penetrate his screens: *You can't do anything here. Follow your orders and head for Mars. The source of our trouble is undoubtedly in that area. Contact the Lunar Interstellars. We're calling for all the help we can get. Now get going!*

But Germain! — came Rocky's thought. *I can't leave a buddy in a jam, Borg!*

If he can't take care of himself there's nothing you or the Guardsmen can do. There's more at stake than Germain. He gave you orders. Carry them out!

Anchors aweigh! came Rocky's reply.

Which was a significant little remark. While the four robots closed in on Germain, one hundred sleek, powerful, super-equipped space warships wearing the gold-emblazoned symbol of the Sword of Agarthi on their prows, emerged through a shaft in the towering side of Amnyi Machen, and many intelligences, friendly and unfriendly, between Terra and Luna, were aware of their headlong plunge into the bottomless sea of outer space. These same intelligences were also aware of twenty-five mighty space battleships of the old interstellar class rising out of Agarthian depths—mile long fortresses built on the Elder Race pattern.

Unfortunately, this action also alerted the quasi-established Terrestrial Government. Agarthian operators were besieged with messages from the capitals of the world requesting an explanation. When they were finally informed that an alien invasion was imminent, they soon suspected that it was an Agarthian trick. Some nations merely alerted their new space fleet units, while others acted more rashly. The latter sent their ships into space to meet any challenge on the part of Agarthi. Obviously, it was Gormski's influence again, based on the remind-

er that Germain had hurled an ultimatum at the U.N.

To many a Terrestrial the sight of their own space warships over their heads was comforting and a source of new-found pride, but to Borg and Mandir and Germain it was a mess. This was not counter-aggression. It was sheer exposure to the twice invisible enemy lurking out there in the depths of space.

Except for the Golden Guardsmen and the Lunar Interstellars and the old line Agarthian fleet. Perhaps in that direction lay salvation. That, and what Borg and Grange were working on in frantic haste.

In the midst of all this, four robots found the door to Mandir's meditation chamber, behind which Germain stood at bay. Four robots possessing psychic eyes, cold, impassive, intent on their goal. They were not trying to capture Germain. He knew that now. They were on a mission of destruction. In their interlocked mentalities was one driving impulse: *Stephen Germain must die!*

But Germain had no intention of dying. Fear could result from not knowing what to do in an emergency. Germain felt no fear because he knew what he was doing. In fact, he was the only one who felt that his was not a stand against death but a trap for the enemy. Not a complete trap. He would not be able to trap the robots, but in the struggle he might be able to gain important knowledge pertaining to the nature of the enemy. And that

was what he was after, for otherwise he was sure he could have been elsewhere.

He had foreseen, long ago, the need for such a special citadel as this chamber. He only regretted that it was not yet hooked up to the Universal Power generator in the war lab. Still, its ray screens were powered by nuclear energy, and all the man-made electrical energy in the world would have been impotent before those screens.

The robots apparently could not bring with them, into their strangely projected materialization, the physical accoutrements necessary to penetrate his screens, so they resorted to a very simple method of approach. They used the disintegrators they had taken from the guards. Not against the screens, which would have been futile, but against the structure of the palace, itself. They disintegrated the floor and carved out a cavern beneath it. Conductor cables parted, and the screens collapsed. Before Borg could transmit a power beam to substitute for electronic conduction, the robots blasted into the chamber.

It was then that Germain duplicated a feat which had been achieved heretofore only by members of the Elder Race. The weapons in the robots' hands suddenly changed their physical location. They were found days later in shrubbery surrounding the palace.

The robots were not defenseless, however. They had wrung the necks

and crushed the skulls of half a dozen Agarthians. And Germain was made of flesh and blood. So they closed in on him.

Still he knew that he was safe, having made certain successful experiments before their arrival. So he probed them and studied them in frantic haste.

The robots brought into play their psychic paralysis, which at first he sought, experimentally, to resist. If the force had been transmitted by a living brain it would have made no headway, but Germain knew it was powerfully augmented, so he did not waste his energy resisting it. He knew it could only paralyze his conscious mind, but since his subconscious mind had long since become voluntary he carried on almost unhampered, although physically he could not move a muscle.

Pavlovich, he thought at them. *Desist at once or you're done for.*

He knew that though the robots were not human their activator was. And he knew that activator's psychology.

At once his subconscious mind was filled with augmented *human* thought. And with that thought came the impression of hate, triumph and vast amusement.

At last you die, Germain! Make way for the New Order!

That was all Germain wanted. Extra-sensory perception raced back along that human thought line, and in an instant he telepathed to Borg: *Position of enemy ship—five hun-*

dred miles, at ninety degrees, straight on. Before he could give Pavlovich the death blow, the latter's psychic screens chopped him off.

And in that instant, the robots closed in. But just as they reached for Germain in one corner of the chamber, he disappeared.

In the same moment, he reappeared behind Borg and Grange, down in the war lab. Removed from the influence of the psychic paralysis, his conscious faculties were as suddenly regained.

"Have you got it yet?" he asked them.

They looked up at him in astonishment and elation, but there was absolutely no time for exclamations. They subdued their questions and emotions in view of the press of circumstances, like the proper Elders that they had become.

"We've been synthesizing the necessary harmonic pattern," said Grange, "and this will have to be it!" He threw a switch and Borg worked four vernier adjustments while they watched the second order oscilloscopes, scopes that could give a sine-wave fix on frequencies ranging above a million megacycles, close to the border of light waves.

"This is better than an interference scrambler," said Borg. "The enemy screen is limited to around a million megs. We can scramble and penetrate by means of oscillations between inferior and superior frequencies on the second order level

produced by sub-nuclear excitations—on the basis of higher harmonics built up from the basic frequencies. Watch!”

The new televisibeam, operating on secondary type energy, brought them a wavering, ghostly image of Pavlovich's screen out in space. As they watched, the great sphere of energy ripped open, and suddenly there sprang into view on the primary type radar screens a clear indication of the ship, itself.

Without speaking, Germain made a lightning swift movement and threw in the Universal Powered war ray switches. But in the same instant, Pavlovich covered himself with an incredibly powerful first order screen. He split it open just one fiftieth of a second to retaliate with a new weapon—demagnetization. A quarter mile chunk of Amnyi Machen flashed into nothingness, but it was mostly snow and ice, precipitating landslides outside Agarathi that lasted for two days.

Before any further damage could be done, the alien ship retreated, because its titantic screens, powered from some central source elsewhere, had begun to weaken under the impact of irresistible Universal Powered disrays from Agarathi. And in that retreat they saw another weapon of the enemy. It was super velocity. The ship virtually disappeared, from the point of view of ordinary vision. But Germain's ESP followed it, unable to reach Pavlovich because the psychic screen was out again.

“That must be inertialess drive!” ejaculated Grange.

“It is,” said Germain. “We've got to work fast. Duplicate your present weapon and equip every ship you can. All ships must be able to break the secondary type screen, and they must be able to 'see' the enemy in all encounters. Transmit your information to the Lunar Interstellars as well. Janice is with the Guardsmen. She'll be able to direct their technicians.”

“This has all been recorded,” said Borg, “and Agarthian technicians are already working on sub-nuclear assemblies which can be rocketed to all our ships in robot fliers. I'll send extras for the Lunar boys. The Agarthians can take over from here. Grange and I want to go out in our lab ship and work on the flying discs in outer space. There's something there we have to track down.”

“I think you're right,” said Germain. “They may be a clue to the source of the alien control.” At that moment Mandir came into the lab, and Germain turned to him. “You are in charge here,” he said. “We're leaving. I'm taking the *Nova* at once.”

“Congratulations!” beamed Mandir, enthusiastically. “You have achieved auto-teleportation! That was wonderful!”

“What about the robots?” asked Germain.

“They have dematerialized.”

“I thought so.” Germain's forward jutting brows lowered as he faced

the other three. "Friends," he said, "this is no picnic. The world, the solar system, perhaps *more than that*—" they knew he had something definitely in mind when he emphasized the last three words, but he was non-committal — "stands at the crossroads in this moment. And may God help us!"

"God helps him who helps himself," said "Little Willy" Grange, stroking the side of his nose, thoughtfully. "And by that token He should be disposed to give you a lot of assistance, Germain."

Borg snarled appreciatively at this remark as Germain left the laboratory . . .

* * *

BALD and myopic Gerhardt Eidemann started nervously but swiftly regained his composure when Nicholas materialized in his prison cell in Berlin. He recognized Nicholas as anyone might have recognized Adolf Hitler under similar circumstances. He had never known Nicholas personally, but he knew him for what he was—ruthless and capable, a born tyrant, conqueror of kings, and murderer of all who would stand in his way.

"I thought you were dead," he said, trying not to give the other the satisfaction of having been impressed. Inwardly, he burned with curiosity and wonderment.

"They all thought I was dead," replied the materialization, now no

longer in evening dress but in his old, resplendent uniform he had worn as master of thirty nations, complete with the original Star of Honor medal and his cape of royal purple. "But the world will soon know that I am very much alive!"

"What are you doing here?"

"I have come for you," said Nicholas. "You are very necessary to my plans."

"Why?"

"Because you understand interstellar science. Outside of the actual Agarthians, Earthmen who have that knowledge are fewer than the fingers of my hand."

"I can name them," said Eidemann. "Myself, Stephen Germain and Julius Borg."

"Precisely. Do you wish, voluntarily, to join forces with me and delve into such science again, on a much larger scale than before?"

"Your object?" queried Eidemann, trying to contain himself in his growing elation.

"World domination. What else?" Nicholas' gray eyes flashed with the old light of confidence and triumph. "Earth shall be mine again, and this time permanently. What you and I can set up on this globe will stop even an interstellar invasion. Even the solar system will be ours and all its worlds, from Mercury to Pluto!"

"What have you got?" queried Eidemann, cautiously, for he knew the illusions of the megalomaniac, and he could only share in such

dreams on the basis of facts and figures. He was a cold-blooded scientist, unmoved by mere aspiration.

Then Nicholas lay at the feet of Gerhardt Eidemann, social outcast and international criminal, the kind of world that Eidemann the scientist could appreciate. "I can prove this," Nicholas told him, his eyes blazing with enthusiasm. "I have a space armada, an army of telepathic robots, magnetic disintegrators, invisibility to all primary wave phenomena. I possess subnuclear equipment, psychic paralysis, inertialess drive—everything you will need as a basis for expanding the potentialities into armaments that will be invincible!"

"You did not acquire this all by yourself," said Eidemann. "Who's in it with you—Martians?"

"No. It is a secret race which now dominates the planet, Mars. I have been on Mars for the past year, and I dare say I've made good use of my time there."

"What of *them*?" queried Eidemann, persistently. "What's their cut?"

"They want it all, naturally. But just as naturally I intend that they shall have nothing. With your help I hope to get possession of Universal Power. Once we have it they will be powerless, and I'm sure they may even be destroyed. In fact, they must be destroyed. They are not human."

To any intellect lesser than Eidemann's, all this would have been incredible, but logic told him that if

Nicholas could prove half of what he claimed there was a good chance of realizing his dreams.

"All right," he said. "When do we get started? Can you get me out of here?"

"If I had one of those old teletransporters you used to work on, it would be easier," replied Nicholas, "but the Agarthians picked them all up. Anyway, just stand by for a few moments."

The international prison in Berlin was taken by surprise when a mysterious space ship suddenly appeared out of nowhere. All guards were mentally paralyzed. Three-eyed robots blasted their way in to Eidemann's cell unmolested, and he walked with them out to the ship. Before superior, space war equipment could be brought into play in the Berlin area, the ship was gone.

And so Eidemann began his new career under Nicholas, returning conqueror. . . .

There were many others who were approached secretly by Nicholas' growing forces, in many cities and countries. Within a few days, willing cooperators were alerted and began to be equipped with the instruments of a super science. There was no need for propaganda machines or cold wars this time. The evidence and the power were immediately at hand, and those who coveted personal advantage were quickly bought over to the cause of mass enslavement to the benefit of the few. The new *Politburo* was on the march.

WITHIN a week, Eidelmann reported to Nicholas, on board their hidden Nrlanian ship in eastern Russia.

"I have been working extensively on the robots," he said. "They are obviously controlled by some central source of power located on or near Mars. If we can locate that central control and take possession of it, we have the robots. If your assumption is correct, that the true Nrlanians are few in number, stripping them of their central control and their robots will practically leave them helpless. Of course having a control over their central is tantamount to having victory over them, but that may be harder to acquire than their robots. There may be alternatives. I am working on a substitute control here on Terra, with the help of a number of my old aides your men have helped me locate. I'm quite sure we can take over robot control without capturing the Nrlanian central—or at least we can control all the robots in our command. I think that's the right direction to take."

"There may be more to Nrlanian Central Control than we imagine. I want Universal Power. If the Nrlanians strike at us, we'll need it—and we'll need that Zero Bomb you were working on in the old days. What about that?"

"My notes on that are still available, but I had brought my experiments to the point where the computations showed irrefutably that

the Zero Bomb would be suicide to use, inasmuch as it would precipitate a propagating chain reaction in stable matter, resulting in the instant destruction of the planet, itself. The thing requires further research and as a matter of fact I have two of my best nuclear physicists working on the math right now."

Nicholas thought: If Earth won't submit, or if the Nrlanians think they're going to take it from me, I'll use the Zero Bomb and make a string of asteroids out of the planet. But he said, "What about Universal Power?"

"Your robots seem to be doing a good job in that direction. They've raided several Terrestrial plants and uprooted the whole outfit in each case. It's dangerous using them for the job, however. Obviously they would not be permitted by their Central Control to steal Universal Power if that control thought we could use it against the Nrlanians. The conclusion to be drawn is that they intend to use it, themselves."

"I doubt that we will give them that chance," replied Nicholas, tonelessly. His fists suddenly clenched. "Damn Pavlovich for a blundering idiot! The whole world is alerted now and Germain, instead of being dead, is at large. No telling where or how he may strike in that Elder Race ship of his."

"And there are the Golden Guardsmen, the Agarthians, the Lunar Interstellars, and the Terrestrial fleets," put in Eidelmann unconsolingly.

"We can handle mere space armadas," said Nicholas, confidently. "It's Germain I'm worried about—and *Borg*. Where is he?"

"He may be busy arriving at conclusions similar to ours. My experimental ship is almost completed, according to reports from my construction division. With it we should start locating Central Control and catch the Nrlanians napping before Germain or *Borg* beat us to it. That, I think, is the final key to everything."

"I am giving that operation top priority," said Nicholas. "When can you be ready?"

"In about three more days. I have all the industrial facilities of Irkutsk isolated for that exclusive task, and three full robot crews—"

"I want that ship in forty-eight hours!" interrupted Nicholas.

"We can't do the impossible—"

Nicholas stood up and stamped his booted foot. "We *are* doing the impossible!" he shouted. "I want that ship ready in two days!"

"Then give me another crew of robots."

AT that moment an orderly rushed in and clicked to attention before Nicholas. He handed him a secret dispatch from the electro-observatory at Cheremkhovo, which town was also in the hands of the robot fifth column and Terrestrial collaborators.

Nicholas looked at the interlinear decoding of the dispatch, smiled

coldly, and handed it to Eidelmann.

Eidelmann read:

TERRESTRIAL GOVERNMENT FLEET ATTACKING YOUR THIRD FLOTILLA.

Eidelmann looked up. "So the trick worked," he said. "Revealing a portion of the fleet to their radar drew them out where you want them."

"I want you to watch this," said Nicholas. "We'll watch it on our own screens." At the same time he put on a helmet made of fine silver mesh. He worked the controls of a type of transmitter which Terra had never seen before. "My third flotilla is going to step on an ant," he said.

Nicholas closed his eyes and concentrated grimly for about a minute. Thanks to Nrlanian science, he was able to transmit a multiple order to twenty-five hundred robots in twenty-five superdreadnaughts of the void.

But in that same instant, Eidelmann was astounded to observe a miraculous change that suddenly came over the Russian orderly, who had remained in the room. The expression of deference vanished from his face, and he suddenly looked at Nicholas with an inhuman gleam in his eyes.

It was those eyes that Nicholas saw when he opened his.

"Remember," said the orderly, in a strange voice, "that I am omnipresent. You can never deceive me."

Nicholas blanched, then quickly recomposed himself. He knew that

Izdran had penetrated his camp.

"What—who is it?" gasped Eidelmann.

The orderly turned to him. "I am Izdran," he said. "What would any of you be if I suddenly withdrew the activating power from the robot fleet? Just remember you need me. Don't make the childish mistake of underestimating the Nrlani!"

Nicholas impatiently removed his headpiece. "This is just another cheap demonstration," he said. "There's work to be done. Now leave us alone!"

"Perhaps," said the orderly, "you would not be so sure of yourself if you knew that the deception you plan will be valueless to you even if you succeed."

Nicholas raised one eyebrow but said nothing. He only glared back at the orderly.

The latter smiled gloatingly. "You humans are such playthings," he said. "Your little emotions are so transparent. All your senses of value are relative, never specific. All that which you desire—power, wealth, victory—would be nothing, Nicholas, without the one little keystone that must ultimately support the emotional arch of your triumph."

"What in the hell are you talking about!" shouted Nicholas.

"Lillian Germain."

For the second time, Nicholas blanched. He stiffened, and his hand went to his radium pistol at his belt. Instinctively, he suddenly sprang in front of the orderly and

clutched him by the collar, anger making him blind to reason, for the gesture was futile as far as Izdran was concerned.

"You have her!" he exclaimed. "Tell me where she is!"

"Or you'll *what!*" The orderly's eyes blazed with an inhuman light.

"I'll blast you and your stinking sky city out of the solar system! Now tell me where she is!"

"You'll do exactly and precisely what you are told to do," came the cold reply. "When you are ready to come to reasonable terms, after your work is done on Terra to *our* satisfaction, you can have her. Not before!"

Suddenly, a startled orderly was looking at Nicholas and wondering what had happened. And in another moment he was even more startled, because Nicholas broke his nose with a blow of his fist. Eyes filled with tears of pain, and with the lower half of his face overrun with blood, he stood there stiffly but trembling in his fear and bewilderment.

Eidelmann half rose to his feet. "What the devil—" he protested.

"Get out of here!" shouted Nicholas, knowing that Izdran had ceased possessing the soldier. The latter ran bleeding from his presence.

Nicholas paced the floor in a blind rage. He clicked on intercoms and telecasting equipment, barked orders to all strategic offices on board and on land and yelled at Eidelmann in between.

"Assign your best scientific aide

to the project of taking over robot control from Nrlanian Central. You get on that special ship of yours personally and get it done! I want direct control of the robots, and I want to know where Nrlanian Central is hidden! If we find it, we won't try to take it. That's a little suicide task for my expendable friend Pavlovich! I want a Universal Power unit installed on his special ship. He may not know it, and I hope he doesn't, but a Universal Power unit packs more potential explosive power, if it's shorted by a collision, than ten hydrogen bombs. Enough to blow a moon out of its orbit."

Suddenly he stopped pacing and looked with widened eyes at Eidelmann.

"Moon!" he exclaimed, as Eidelmann suddenly caught onto the same idea. "A Martian moon! What a fool I've been! Maybe we can narrow our search down! Central Control might be either on Deimos or Phobos!"

"Dass lasst sich leicht denken," Eidelmann murmured, half aloud, in his own language.

"What was that?"

"I said there's plenty of work to be done . . ."

NICHOLAS had a temporary villa established near his ship, on the outskirts of Irkutsk. Here, among other human equipage attached to his growing command bivouac, was Trinha Llih.

She was in negligee that night preparatory to retiring when Pavlovich came brazenly into her room. It was his first appearance since Mars.

He paused for a moment to look at her, his eyes taking her in hungrily. Then he strode across the room and pulled her into his arms, kissing her and holding her so tightly that she gasped for air.

"Let me go!" she exclaimed, in her own tongue.

"You're mine!" he exclaimed, heatedly. "Nicholas has everything else! Besides, I've got plans and you're a part of them!"

Suddenly, Trinha relaxed in his arms and smiled up at him. She had come to her shining world of Panh at last, and she had seen enough. To her it was dirty congestion and a mass of confusion in the midst of impossible abundance. Moreover, the gravitation wearied her, forcing her to spend a large part of her time lying down. But she had not been entirely idle. She wanted to return to Mars, and she still had her dream of vengeance against Nicholas. Pavlovich, it suddenly occurred to her, might be her only ally.

"You startled me so," she said. "Where have you been? Did you get Germain?"

"No, but it's just as well," he answered. "Germain's going to keep Nicholas and the Nrlani occupied while I lay my own plans."

"What are your plans?"

"One of them is to get rid of Nicholas and take over where he

left off. What do you think of that?" His brown eyes glared at her challengingly.

She smiled in a peculiarly Martian way, with a sweetness that was deadly because it was ice cold. "I hate Nicholas," she said. "I'll help you destroy him."

Pavlovich's brown eyes went up a notch. "How could you help me?"

"You want control of the robots, don't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Eidemann has been preparing a second control. He plans to control them from here."

"You mean—independent of Nrlanian control?"

"Yes. And I know where those new controls are."

Pavlovich grinned in triumph. "You show me where," he said, "and I'll promise you Nicholas' head on a silver platter."

"I wouldn't serve it to a krnar!" she exclaimed, fiercely.

"Where are Eidemann's new controls?" he persisted.

"In the basement of this house," she answered. "I've been there several times. They know I'm a Martian and don't speak their language, but what they don't know is that I understand everything. I know what they're doing down there. They can't fool me!"

Pavlovich looked down into her face, curiously. "How could you understand everything in a place like that?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "But I

do. Take my word for it. The controls are there and they are almost completed."

"I'll find out. If what you say is true, I have a chance against Nicholas and the Nrlani, too. Trinha, are you with me?"

Controlling her revulsion, she kissed him.

And far away, somewhere, that little scene caused a very inhuman entity to laugh. It was a laugh one might have expected of someone who had just won another move in an intricate game—like chess . . .

* * *

THERE was one more item Germain had to attend to before he sprang into action. That was Lillian's safety. He entered the meditation chambers of the King and made full use of his prodigious mind.

Far across Asia his perception expanded; out beyond the China Sea and the Philippines, to Guam.

Auburn-haired Yvonne was in the laboratory citadel there, perched high on old Com Mar hill, overlooking Asan and the reef-whitened sweep of the sunlit ocean. Yvonne was not a scientist, but she could act as one. In the lab was a thought tape taken from Germain's mind. If she forgot how to operate the mysterious equipment there, she had only to repeat a reading of the tape, and again she was Germain's right hand at the controls. They were dangerous inventions, untried before by mere

Terrestrials, and he had made it clear to her and her brother, Kent, that she would be risking her life if she were ever called upon to use them. But she had begged for the chance to work for Agarthi. It was her personal contribution to the new world Germain was trying to build—and protect. He had chosen her deliberately because of her inability to comprehend what she would be operating if called upon to handle the equipment. This was to provide for the failure of any enemy attempt to read her mind, because the mental tape was treated to make an ephemeral impression only, which would fade each time she accomplished her purpose at the controls. On the tape was only the secret of how to operate the equipment. How or why it worked or what it actually did was Germain's secret, alone. He and the Elder People's. For that equipment was the result of a type of reasoning and a cosmic point of view which even Borg or Mandir had not yet conceived of.

In the midst of her daily routine about the place, Yvonne was suddenly aware of Germain.

Where is Lillian?—he asked her.

The girl's hazel eyes widened in fright. She had never been able to accustom herself to Germain's manifestations of mutant intelligence.

"She—she never arrived," responded Yvonne, instinctively terrorized because of the necessity of talking to nothing but the air.

You have her direction finder, per-

sisted Germain. Turn it on.

Obediently, the girl hastened into the laboratory and found a familiar little switch, which she turned on. A large electron tube began to glow with a bluish light, and a subtle hum pervaded the vast room. At the same time, a multiple loop antenna began to gyrate above the tube. Beside the switch, a small ammeter kicked feebly into life.

Fix the position!—came Germain's thought. *Calibrate!*

Quickly, Yvonne threw another switch, and a vernier scale leaped into life. She manipulated a manual control, affecting the antenna and the vernier needle immediately responded to the lesser deviation of the ammeter.

Then, just as suddenly, everything went dead.

A screen has been thrown up, came Germain's tense thought. *What a fool I am! Kent was not Kent at all! He is in the hands of the enemy. And so is Lillian!*

"What do you mean?" cried Yvonne, frantically. "Where are they?"

No time to communicate with you on that point. I'm going after them. In the meantime, keep a finder on me, and keep Lil's finder activated. Stand by for further instructions. And one thing more . . .

"Yes?"

Turn on the Chronoperceptor.

Yvonne's aquiline face blanched as she looked up at a two story mass of sub-nuclear equipment that would

have staggered the imagination of any normal human being. Up to this point she had been operating straight Terrestrial type gear. But this was Elder Race equipment. The Chrono-perceptor loomed above her, enigmatically, like the gateway to a world that lay beyond the era of Man. She feared it, but she moved to obey.

She threw in more switches, and a prismatic display of colors began to dance in the room to the tune of harmonic effects in the atmosphere which seemed to be akin to the very music of the spheres . . .

IN the meantime, Germain's perception raced elsewhere, afar into space, following the lead given him by Lillian's finder before it went dead. He detected a fleeing ship by virtue of its secondary screen, which he could not penetrate, and beyond it lay a gigantic screen, miles in diameter. There was something there of tremendous import, and he was determined to investigate it in the

flesh.

Minutes later, there arose from the remains of Amnyi Machen's peak a titanic vessel on the prow of which was engraved one word: *Nova*. Inside, in addition to a picked Agarthian crew, were Germain, David and Ingaborg.

And soon in its wake followed another special ship engaged in a separate mission, bearing Borg, Grange and a laboratory of equipment, including their new flying saucer trap.

Beyond them lay the unknown enemy, and out there in the great darkness were the Golden Guardsmen, the Lunar Interstellars, the Agarthians, and the inexperienced Terrestrial fleet. Behind lay Agarthi, commanded now by Mandir. And there was the whole world, waiting for new triumph and a further step toward the Infinite, or for defeat and slavery.

The battle was on . . .

(To be continued next issue)

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Evanston, Illinois

TRADITION

By J. J. Mc Intosh

LIEUTENANT Crisp pushed two crates aside, swayed easily and unconcernedly as something jarred the ship, and said in a normal conversational tone: "All right. You can come out now."

A man's head, his face blackened with soot, appeared above the crates. He was grinning wryly. "I'd have had to come out soon anyway," he admitted. "But I meant to stick it out a little longer. We're too far out to go back, I hope?"

"Far too far. Sergeant Roberts!"

"Sir!" A giant of a man appeared beside the lieutenant, his eyes widening as he saw the stowaway.

"Sir?" said the stowaway dazedly. "Is he blind?"

The lieutenant grinned faintly. "Come on out," she said.

The man moved the crates and stood in a parody of attention before her. He rated high in impudence, Anne Crisp thought, like a cheeky gypsy with his black face and ragged clothes. But he didn't talk like a gypsy, and anyone who meant to hide in the shadows of a spaceship's hold would blacken his face and dress in rags. His impudence was another matter. Given a chance she would take him down a peg or two.

"Now you take me to see the

captain, don't you?" remarked the stowaway.

"That's right. What's your name?"

"Alan Gladwin. But I should have said John Smith, shouldn't I? What's yours?"

"Lieutenant Crisp."

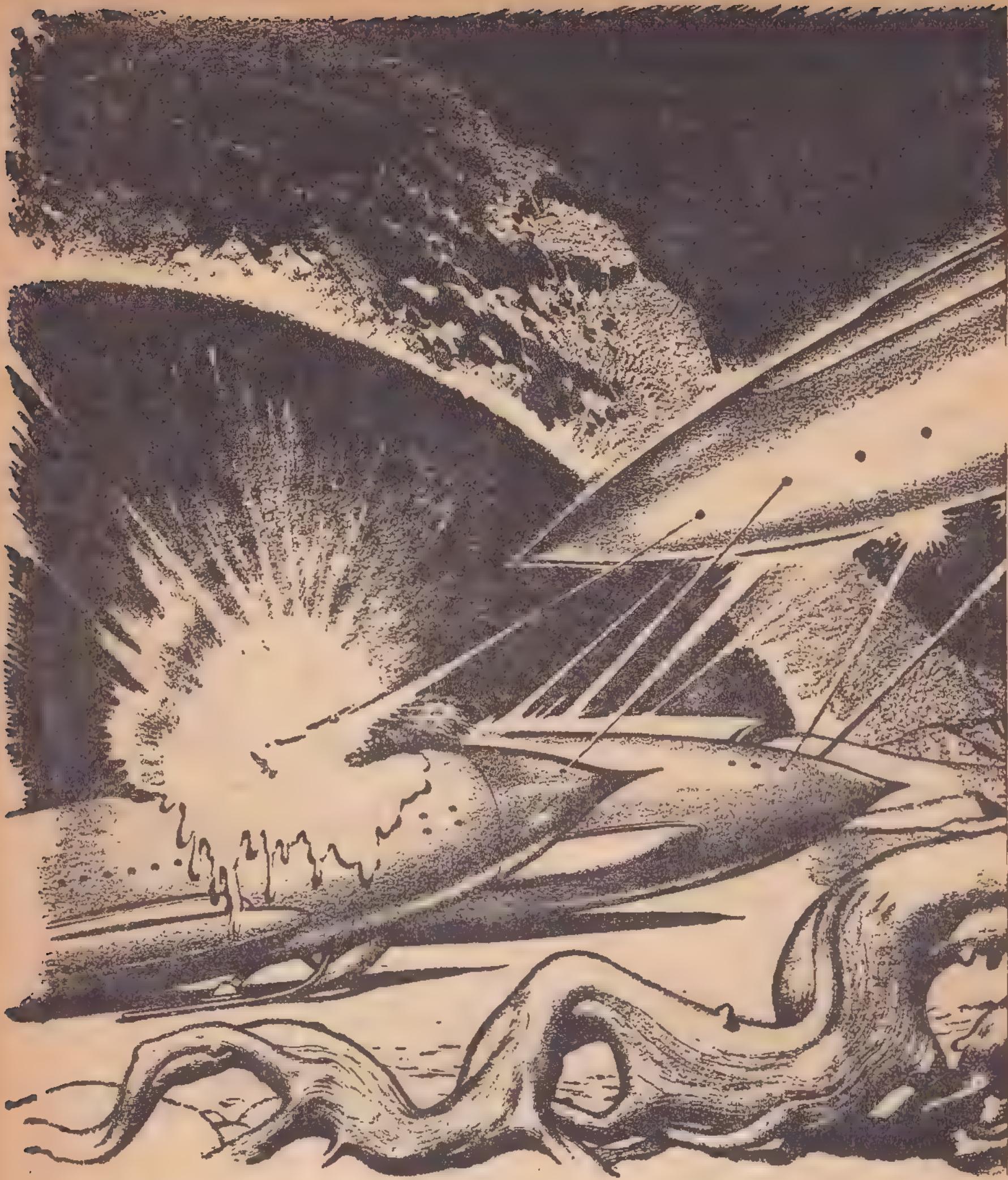
"And the other part? There is another part, isn't there? They didn't christen you Lieutenant."

Anne took him by one arm and Roberts by the other. He was no taller than Anne, and she wasn't tall even for a woman. They could have carried him between them with his legs in the air.

"Why did the Sergeant call you sir?" Gladwin asked.

"You talk too much." But she answered his question. "Tradition," she said. "The crew of the first spaceships were all men, and the articles of the navy are written solely in the male gender. Women in the navy sign on as men and refer themselves as men. But it's only conventional. There's no pretence, except formally, that they really are men."

"You don't say," said Gladwin, and murmured something regretably audible which would have made Anne blush if she'd been anything but a lieutenant in the navy.



"What happens to me now?" he asked.

"You're tried, sentenced to death, and shot," she replied casually.

"That's not very funny."

"Not to you, I suppose. You

shouldn't have chosen a naval ship. You'd have been all right on a freighter."

"But there isn't a freighter to Pluto for months!" He was beginning to lose his impudence now, not



Traditions, Gladwin discovered, are here to stay; especially Naval traditions. Confronted with the prospect of a five-year hitch in the Space Navy, his only hope was to find a way to use these traditions to his advantage.

unnaturally, and Anne took a malicious pleasure in the change. He should have known better than to stow away in the *Arachnid*, knowing so little about the navy.

The captain was like a film major or skipper, stocky, grizzled, heavy-browed. He showed no more surprise at seeing Gladwin than Anne had done.

"Stowaway, lieutenant?" he said, with one raised eyebrow.

"Among the provisions, sir."

"How did he miss the ground check?"

"I imagine he moved about during the search and was lucky. He tried to do it again, just now, but I heard him."

"Very well, Sergeant, send in Lieutenants James, Hill and Cutter. If you can't find any of them, send one of the sub-lieutenants instead. And hurry. I want to get this over with."

They waited as the sergeant saluted, went out and closed the door. The captain remained seated at his desk, impatient, trying to concentrate on the papers before him, but distracted by the business in hand. Anne stood at ease, neat and efficient-looking in her dark blue jacket and razor-edged slacks, ash-blond hair tucked under her white cap. She kept one eye on the prisoner, who moved uneasily from one foot to the other, small, curly-haired, dirty, refusing to believe that they would really shoot him but afraid that they just possibly might.

The door opened again and two men and a woman entered. One of the men was hardly more than a boy, a tall, friendly-looking youngster who couldn't have been a lieutenant long. The other was much older, as old as the captain, but without his commanding presence. The woman was middle-aged, but looked fit, tough and fearless.

"We won't need chairs," said the captain. "Stand here, gentlemen, please. This won't take long."

Gladwin was reminded involuntarily of what Anne had told him. The captain didn't say "Ladies and gentlemen" as the ear expected. Even if you were thinking of something else the single word, when you expected three, caught your attention and you wondered for an instant what it was that had sounded strange.

"Lieutenant Crisp, report, please," said the captain.

Anne stepped forward and stated briefly where she had found the prisoner and what he had said. Then she stepped back in line. But there was no stiff formality. It was like the performance just before the dress rehearsal, everyone taking it easy.

It went so quickly and easily that Gladwin was shocked to realize he had already been tried, found guilty and sentenced, while he was still looking for something to say.

"Wait," he exclaimed. "You can't—"

"Lieutenant Hill," said the captain. "Detail the firing party."

The older of the four lieutenants said "Yes, sir"—no salute; 'yes, sir,' not 'aye, aye, sir'—and left the room. The others, at ease now that the trial was over, looked curiously at Gladwin.

It was unreal—anything connected with one's own death is unreal, even when it is happening. No sane, healthy man ever unreservedly believes that he is just about to die.

"For heaven's sake!" Gladwin exclaimed with something of his old spirit: "Can't I even wash my face first?"

"Better not," said the captain dryly. "You'll show up better as you are against the light walls."

That silenced Gladwin so effectively that he said not another word as Hill came back and they led him to a bare gallery high in the ship where four men with guns, under Sergeant Roberts, were waiting. They were men, Gladwin thought dazedly, although one of them looked very like a girl.

He refused the formal offer of a bandage over his eyes. Searching his mind for something to stop the shooting he remembered the package he had found in the hold. He opened his mouth . . .

"Fire!" the sergeant ordered.

The gallery was full of sound. Gladwin fell involuntarily and scrambled up, red with shame.

"The firing party seems to have missed," said the captain calmly. "In accordance with regulations we can now press him for five years'

service. Lieutenant Crisp, please see to it." He and the officers and the firing party left Gladwin with Anne and Sergeant Roberts.

Gladwin looked at the wall behind him. No one had missed. The guns had been loaded with blanks.

"Another tradition, I suppose," he said bitterly.

"Yes," Anne told him, smiling at the recollection of Gladwin falling, sure he must have been hit. She didn't say so, but he knew it, and went red again. "In the early days," she went on, "when ships were powered by rockets, the payload was worked out to the last ounce. There was nothing over. Spacemen sweated in steam baths before take-off, bringing themselves down to a fixed weight like boxers. Provisions were just enough to keep everyone alive."

She snapped her fingers. "One man extra, and the trip was impossible. They either couldn't reach their destination, or they'd starve before they got there. They couldn't turn back, because they didn't know how. It would have taken a month to make a vast curve, and all the fuel would be gone. So there was only one answer. Shoot all stowaways and drop their bodies in space. It became legal. It still is, though the need for it has gone."

"I suppose you couldn't give me a hint?" asked Gladwin. "You had me thinking I was going to be shot. Is that tradition too?"

"No. For one thing, most people know a little about the navy. There's

plenty of books about it, you know, if you take the trouble to read them. And then we've been known to give stowaways a hint that we don't really shoot them any more. But you were sticking your neck out, so I let you think what you liked."

"That was nice of you," said Gladwin sarcastically. "Did I hear someone say something about my joining the navy?"

"Yes. The guns are loaded with blanks, and you sign on. It's automatic."

"Is it hell. Five years in the navy? No thanks. You can lock me up."

Anne's face didn't change expression, but the sergeant grinned.

"What now?" asked Gladwin suspiciously.

"If you don't sign on, you're shot again tomorrow morning. Then the next morning. And so on every twenty-four hours. But while it's traditional that the guns are loaded with blanks the first time, by the third or fourth time it's at the discretion of the captain and the gunnery officer — that's Hill — what they're loaded with."

"You mean they really will shoot me? Or are you just trying to frighten me into signing something?"

"Let's take him below, sergeant," said Anne. They grasped his arms as before. He tried to shake them off, but the sergeant hardly noticed his efforts, and what Anne's grip lacked in strength it made up in

science. He was helpless.

"You've made a bit of a mess of this, haven't you?" Anne remarked. "You decide to stow away on a ship for Pluto, which was stupid. They'd only send you back anyway. You pick a naval vessel, knowing nothing about the navy, which was stupider. Almost anyone could have told you that meant five years in the navy. And to crown your stupidity, you pick a ship that isn't going to Pluto anyway."

Gladwin's mouth fell open and he didn't seem to have the strength to shut it. "Isn't going . . ." he repeated blankly.

"Of course you couldn't know that. We're still on a course for Pluto in case anyone is watching us. But that won't last much longer. You had to pick a ship on special duties. You know what that means? We're not on a routine patrol. If we were the captain might have you shot with blanks every morning. But this is business, so if you don't join up it won't be long before one of those blanks has a sting."

"Okay," said Gladwin disgustedly. "I'll join. If I'm not going to Pluto I'd have to join the army or the navy or something anyway."

"Why, what did you want on Pluto?"

"A man who's got all my money. People who wanted to run out used to go to Africa or South America. Now they can go much further. Oh well. How long will it take me to be a captain?"

"Ask Captain Crisp."

"Crisp? He's not—?"

"Yes, when we're in port he's my father. Out here he's just Captain Crisp. We forget the relationship. That's another tradition."

"Tradition," said Gladwin. He spat on the word and ground it under his heel. Or at least he made it clear that he wanted to.

That was Alan Gladwin's introduction to the navy. He could hardly guess then that that story was going to pass into tradition too . . .

SPACEMAN Second-class Gladwin threw his mop at the floor as if he was trying to drive it through two inches of steel. As a matter of fact he was.

"Spaceman Gladwin," said a soft voice. He turned and saw Sergeant Roberts, who had a gentle voice for such a big man. "You don't like work, Spaceman Gladwin," said the Sergeant sadly. "You'd rather have another couple of days in the brig."

"Look," said Gladwin. "I realize there's not much to do in space and that naval ships have four times the men they need simply to run the ship. I understand that you must have men doing all sorts of unimportant little jobs just to keep them busy. But must they do anything as silly as polishing shiny decks?"

"Silly," murmured the sergeant, fingering his chin and obviously wondering whether it should be three days instead of two.

"The same thing," said Gladwin,

"is done for so long that you don't question it any more. That's your damned tradition again. You know down in the hold it's always stifling and up in the bows it's freezing? These floors should be painted black instead of kept shiny. Each deck would absorb more heat from the deck below. And it wouldn't be quite so hot in the hold and not quite so cold in the bows."

The sergeant surveyed him for a moment, then left him.

Half an hour later he was back, carrying a tin.

"Spaceman Gladwin," he said, "you've got your first good mark. Now get a brush and paint the deck black."

SPACEMAN First-class Gladwin sat with the whole ship's complement except Lieutenant James, who was in the control room, and listened to Captain Crisp.

"Our mission," he said, "is the capture of the Wreckers."

Nobody laughed. But one or two spacemen and junior officers failed to suppress grins.

"I know," said the captain wearily. "You've heard that before. So has the crew of every ship in the navy—more than once. And our two great successes have been the capture—if you can call it that—of two abandoned bases. Sometimes patrols have had more to go on than we have now. But we have two small advantages. First, the *Arachnid* is supposed to be on her way

to Pluto, and it would be a long time before we'd get there. So even if the Wreckers' spy system is as good as it's supposed to be they won't expect any danger from this ship for at least two months. By that time they'll know we're not on Pluto and will wonder where we are. Second, a beam we had on a Wrecker ship gave us what might be a lead. The ship started from a wreck on a course for Mercury, which meant nothing. But before they'd managed to blanket the beam—and after they probably thought they had—they were making for Venus. So we have a chance. I know we'll have to cover millions of square miles of jungle and desert, and if we're seen doing it we'll be wasting our time. But it's a chance."

SPACEMAN First - class Gladwin made a few preliminary sweeps across the graph paper and firmly drew a neat curve.

"Very nice," said Lieutenant Crisp caustically, "but what's happened to the reading for P6?"

"It would spoil the curve," said Gladwin brightly. "So I left it out."

"It wouldn't do to spoil the curve, of course," Anne admitted. She was taking the advanced navigation class. "Even if your correlates meant that your theoretical ship—just as well it's theoretical—was going to take a dive into Jupiter."

"But it wouldn't," said Gladwin mildly. "You cheated, lieutenant. And misled all these fine young

lads." He indicated the rest of the class with a sweep of his arm. "The reading at P6 was obviously a stationary correlate. And your ship's doing 35,160 m.p.s. So everyone gets a smooth, normal curve with a pimple on it. Which is absurd."

"Don't be too pleased with yourself, spaceman," said Anne. "But the rest of you ought to know better."

CORPORAL Gladwin looked around to make sure no one else was within earshot and asked softly. "Sergeant, what exactly *are* the Wreckers?"

Roberts stared at him. "You mean you don't know—"

"Not so loud. I don't want my inferiors to think I don't know anything. It wouldn't be good for discipline. You're a nice fellow, sergeant. You're fair-minded. So I asked you."

"Where have you been the last ten years?"

"I'm going to trust you with a secret, sergeant. Is it safe with you?"

He looked around again and whispered "I'm a hick."

The sergeant was used to him by now. "Let's have it in English," he suggested.

"I lived in the country all my life. Never went near the big wicked cities. Had a job in a garage, but soon I found I owned the garage, then two or three garages. Don't know quite how it happened."

"I can imagine," said Roberts

ironically. "You just can't help climbing. Seems to come natural to you, even in the navy. If you fell into tar you'd come out smelling of roses." Only he didn't say "tar." "Well, go on," he invited.

"Outside of the big cities it doesn't seem to matter much about naval tradition and space travel and the Wreckers and so on. I never paid much attention. I never meant to leave solid ground until someone made a beautiful sucker out of me and left for Pluto with my last cent. And that brings me up to date. But what I mean is, the Wreckers never bothered me and my garages, so anything I ever heard about them went in one ear and out the other."

"There's not much to know," said Sergeant Roberts. "They use an ordinary ship, very like this one, and there's nothing remarkable about their powers except for one weapon. That's enough. They appear from nowhere—that's easy enough if you know a ship's course, and they always do. You set a course to intercept at right angles or bigger. If you do it properly you're there before the ship has had time to do more than squawk. After that nothing is heard of the ship until it's found drifting, everyone in it dead and everything worth looting gone."

"And why aren't the Wreckers caught?"

"Space is big. Even the solar system is big. And ships are small. The Wreckers' ship always has a start of at least five million miles,

because they never attack any ship that isn't that much from a planet or another ship—unless they're going to board the second ship too. And you just can't chase a ship that has a five million mile start. You can put a radar beam on it, but that can be distorted and anyway the limit is about ten million miles."

"Have you ever seen a ship that's been looted?"

"No, but Lieutenant Crisp has. Ask her."

"Thanks," said Gladwin. "I will."

"CAN I speak to you, sir?" asked Corporal Gladwin.

"You're doing it," said Anne briefly.

"Privately, I mean."

Anne glanced round. "There's no one here," she said.

That wasn't what Gladwin meant, and she knew it. But he took it as assent.

"Sergeant Roberts tells me you've seen a ship looted by the Wreckers," he said. "What's it like? Exactly what do you find?"

"If I tell you," said Anne slowly, "will you tell me something too?"

"If I can."

"What would you say if you were asked to prove, this minute, that you're not one of the Wreckers yourself?"

That silenced Gladwin for only the second time since he had boarded the *Arachnid*.

"This is as far off the record as

you like," said Anne. "You can even call me Anne if you feel like it."

"Well, that's something," said Gladwin, recovering a little.

"The question hasn't arisen yet, but it may. I don't think you're a spy, or I wouldn't be warning you. But look at it this way. You're a corporal now, with more than half the ship's company below you in rank—yet you never went through the rigorous tests and questioning every recruit undergoes. It would have been very clever for the Wreckers to plant a stowaway on this ship, like you, if they discovered its mission, knowing he'd be pressed into service."

"So it would," Gladwin admitted. "Only they didn't."

"That's your story. How would you prove it?"

Gladwin hesitated. "I don't know."

"There's more I haven't mentioned. Your career in the navy looks like being meteoric. You're supposed to know nothing about the navy or space travel or ships, and yet you never put a foot wrong. See how it adds up?"

"I see. It's nice of you to warn me. Unless—"

"Unless I was told to do it?" Anne grinned.

"Perhaps I should be shot for putting you on your guard. But I thought I'd better tell you not to distinguish yourself too markedly if anything happens. If you're seen, to take a hypothetical case, chasing

a Wrecker into a Venusian forest, someone is liable to shoot you in the back."

She stopped, leaving Gladwin with food for thought.

"Now, you wanted to know about the looted ships. Nothing is harmed in them except that everyone is dead. They've obviously died in the same instant. People who were eating, sleeping, reading, talking, making love, dancing, have died on the spot. And the only thing to show that the ship has been boarded is the absence of anything of value."

"How far does that go?"

"You'd never believe how far until you see a looted ship yourself. All money and jewelry is gone. You won't find a single cent, nor necklace, wedding ring, even a silver tie-pin. Women's furs are gone, unless they're quite valueless. Cameras, watches, silver pencils, even clothes."

"But—"

"I know. How is it disposed of. Every source of supply has been checked. With no result. There must be a vast organization for the disposal of loot. Or perhaps it's all stored somewhere—unlikely, for so many of the things that are gone would go out of date soon."

Gladwin thanked her, and thoughtfully wandered away. At the door he came to life, turned with a grin, and said, "Say Anne, can I forget we're in the navy for another sixty seconds?"

"No," said Lieutenant Crisp flatly.

"I thought not, sir," replied Corporal Gladwin.

CORPORAL Gladwin swore suddenly and added something distinctly uncomplimentary to himself. He spoke aloud, but no one looked up in surprise to hear Gladwin admit he was fallible. He was alone in the cabin he shared with three other corporals.

He had only just remembered the packet he had found in the hold. He had had a lot of time to investigate in the two days he had spent there—but no light. So when he found a packet in an unusual place—between a strut on a crate and the crate itself—he put it back carefully and decided to investigate later.

But he had never remembered it except just for an instant before the firing party shot blanks at him.

The probability was that it contained drugs or some other form of contraband, evidently intended for Pluto. Already as he rose from his bunk he was wondering how he could make use of the accidental discovery to win another promotion. It was fully five days since he had been made a corporal.

But it might be as well, he told himself cautiously, to see what was in the package first.

He was careful not to be seen on his way to the hold. It would be very awkward for him, considering what Anne had told him, to be found with contraband of some sort in the hold—especially since he had had so long

to report it.

But no one went near the hold, as a rule. He found the package and opened it carefully. Now he had a key for the light, and he could examine the contents closely.

There was a set of papers proving the identity of Mr. Philip Nilson—without photograph or description. Gladwin didn't know much about identification papers, but these looked as if they must make the bearer pretty important. There was no point in hiding useless papers so carefully.

There was a paper which bore what seemed to be the key to a naval code. It was not complete. It looked as if someone was slowly working it out—or slowly collecting data. There was a packet of pills. Gladwin didn't know what they were, and he didn't swallow one to find out. A set of keys completed the hoard—curious little keys which felt alive under his fingers. He guessed they were moulders, which only had to be left in a lock for half an hour to become perfectly capable of opening that lock at any time.

Carefully Gladwin replaced everything. He would probably be a pretty good chess player, he was telling himself, if only he played chess. For already he was three moves ahead and was considering the fourth.

Disregarding the three obvious moves, he made his guess about the fourth and decided this had nothing

to do with the Wreckers. But move number five was—need anyone know that?

If Alan Gladwin was to keep climbing in the navy, he told himself, no one need know until he was ready. That was, until he was a sergeant.

But now he had to make the first three moves.

“CAN’T even go into the hold now,” Gladwin complained, “without being reminded of Central Park on Saturday night. What’s the navy coming to?”

There was a shout of laughter, for Gladwin was popular and had a gift of saying things so that “Good morning” sounded like a good joke. The idea of Gladwin being concerned about the good name of the navy was worth a laugh any time.

“I’m serious,” he said. He was in the big messroom. About forty men had just heard him sing “Kil-larney” in the manner born. “There’s such a thing as dignity, and when you find young Smith hugging Cutter in a corner—”

The roar could have been heard all over the ship. Smith was seventeen and Lieutenant Cutter the other side of forty. Even Gladwin had to grin at his own remark, and Smith, red as a beetroot, added to the fun by insisting hotly it was a dirty lie.

Gladwin left the subject, for he had done all he intended.

Someone—he didn’t know whom

—would become uneasy at the mention of the hold as a petting park. He might not take the suggestion seriously, but he would take a look to make sure that a certain package was safe.

And the best time to do that would be in a few hours’ time, the main rest period—the “night” of the *Arachnid*.

G LADWIN looked anxiously at the plate in the developing bath. He knew the risk he had taken. He hadn’t seen the man in the hold, only taken the dark-light photograph. If the plate didn’t show who it was, his whole scheme would have been a miserable failure. Perhaps an unpardonable failure, considering that Gladwin had been working on his own on a job the captain should have known about.

He might have done many things. He might have flashed a light in the face of the man in the hold. He might have positioned himself so that he could see whoever went to the hold. But he had wanted to hear the man go straight to the package.

There was the risk that the man, whoever he was, might take the packet away. He hadn’t taken it away, however. Reassured, the man in the dark had put the package back and gone away.

Gladwin sighed in relief as shadows began to form on the plate. Long before the developing was complete, he knew who the man

was. It was Sergeant Thomson. There wasn't a possibility of doubt.

“THE plan,” said Captain Crisp, “hinges on the assumption that the Wreckers, knowing where every naval ship is, or should be, and knowing particularly the movements of those near Venus, may be less cautious than usual. They're about due to make a kill.”

He surveyed the select group crushed in his cabin, all the ship's commissioned and non-commissioned officers. Corporal Gladwin was in, but only just. He was the most junior officer present.

“We can't concern ourselves with that,” he went on. “Even if it's near here we ignore any distress signal and lie doggo. It has gradually become clear that the most vital part of any Wrecker operation, the part most carefully planned, is the return to base. Their ship must be assured of a clear run home. Well, the Wreckers must think that in the next five days it has that; the movements of naval and merchant ships allow a ship a clear run to any location in the northern hemisphere of Venus. They can't know we suspect that Venus is their base, and they can't know the *Arachnid* is here.”

“I take it, sir,” said young Lieutenant James, “that only one ship was detailed for this patrol because more couldn't be withdrawn secretly from other duties?”

“Exactly. We have in effect, invited the Wreckers to attack a ship

during the next five days—unfortunate, but necessary—and permitted them, by our schedules, to dive straight and openly for their base. If this base is on Venus, I think we can guarantee to find it merely by lying over Venus's North Pole for one twenty hours. It's—”

“Sir,” said Corporal Gladwin suddenly. Heads turned in his direction. Junior officers couldn't make suggestions direct. They had to make them to a lieutenant who would pass them on to the captain if he thought them worth it. Gladwin knew this, among many other things about the navy that had been a closed book to him only a few weeks before.

“I know this is irregular, sir,” he said, “but I think before you go on you should know there is a spy among us.”

IN the uproar Gladwin stayed very close to Thomson, even when officers were searching the sergeant. And he did all he could to detract from the effect of Thomson's sincere amazement when the contents of the package were found in the lining of his jacket.

“It's a plant,” Thomson yelled. “I never saw these before in my life. I——”

The captain was shouting for silence, but for once no one paid any attention. Anne was watching Thomson and Gladwin curiously, her hand on the paralyzer at her hip, just in case. James was puz-

zled. Cutter was refusing to believe it. Hill was beside Thomson, watching him closely.

Gladwin caused another surprise by being able to shout everyone else down. "Never mind about whether it's a plant or not," he bellowed. "Remember, Thomson, you never saw them before in your life."

He handed a photograph to Hill, who took a quick glance at it and handed it to Captain Crisp. It showed Thomson plainly in the hold, examining the articles which had just been found on him. He was examining them by touch, but that made no difference.

Thomson didn't see the picture, but the reaction of the officers who did were enough for him. Before Hill knew the danger, Thomson had grabbed the paralyzer from his hip and swung it at Gladwin.

Two beams sizzled as one. Gladwin and Thomson dropped silently.

Anne Crisp put her paralysers back in its holster. "I'm afraid I've killed Thomson," she said. "Pity he got Gladwin. He—"

"Me?" said Gladwin, rising to his feet. "When someone shoots at me, I have sense enough to drop. Particularly if regulations don't allow me to carry a gun."

If there had been uproar before, it was a whisper to the noise that broke now.

"THAT was sheer melodrama, sergeant," said Roberts, naturally emphasising the last word, as

a sergeant who had seen a man enter the service and climb to equality with him, all in three weeks—and starting as a stowaway, which was a tremendous disadvantage. He didn't deny that Gladwin deserved his incredible promotion—but still he emphasised the word 'sergeant'.

"Nothing of the kind," said Gladwin indignantly. "I had to catch Thomson off guard. At a moment when, of all moments, he had every reason to think himself safe. Of course the man was unlucky. I suppose he had to carry a set of false papers—"

"You know damn well he never carried them about with him. Think I'm dumb? You planted them. You found where he hid them and put them in the lining of his jacket instead. That's what you told the captain afterwards, isn't it?"

Gladwin grinned and nodded.

"And you must have made a good case for playing it that way," added Roberts, "or the captain would have had you shot as well."

"Of course, it was all blind luck," Gladwin admitted. "Finding the papers in the hold and—"

"That's right, be modest," grunted Sergeant Roberts. "It's a change, anyway."

"I'm not being modest, only seeing Thomson's point of view." Gladwin looked at Roberts, grinned again and couldn't resist telling him the rest. "The most ironic thing about it," he said, "is that

Thomson probably had nothing to do with the Wreckers."

"Huh?"

"He's been in the navy four years. He's obviously some sort of political spy or agent, reporting to some country or faction on the morale of the navy or its technical secrets. I'd give you ten to one he knows no more about the Wreckers than I do."

Roberts stared, then grinned. "You didn't mention that when the captain was saying all those nice things about the menace to our mission removed by your sagacity."

"I didn't think," said Gladwin mildly, "it would be expedient. They might not have made me a sergeant."

There was no answer to that. At least, Roberts couldn't find one.

HER motors dead, the *Arachnid* was in an orbit over Venus, not a light showing. In the control room were Captain Crisp, Lieutenants Hill, James and Crisp, Sub-lieutenant Neston and Sergeants Roberts and Gladwin. They were staring, from the captain down to Gladwin, with the same incredulity at the working-out of a thousand to one chance. Clearly visible by her flaming exhausts was the Wrecker ship, dropping across the sky. It could be nothing else. And a ship's exhausts could seldom be seen across more than three hundred miles. They had picked the perfect spot for a grandstand view.

"Base of Mount Philippa," whispered James, who knew Venus. "We'd never have guessed. It's far enough from New Paris and Media to be safe, but only just. No one would ever have looked so close to two naval stations for the Wreckers' base."

The faint, shooting glow was gone. The captain shook himself slightly and resumed his responsibilities.

"First, the launch goes to Fettenburg," he said. "We can't risk radio, and New Paris and Media must be alive with spies. Fettenburg's right on the other side of Venus. Should be the best place to take the news. I'll have to send a lieutenant and a sergeant." He looked round. Everyone tried not to call attention to himself. "You, James, and you, Roberts," he said.

The others relaxed. "But, sir," protested James. "I know Venus. I was here for five years."

"That's why I'm sending you. They know you at Fettenburg, and that always helps. Besides, I want you to get there without anyone knowing the *Arachnid* is around. I think you can manage that best."

"Yes, sir," said James.

"Make your arrangements and go now. I'm not sending any written dispatch. You know what to say."

"Yes, sir." James saluted and was gone, taking Roberts with him—two disappointed men.

"I'll take the helicopter and reconnoitre," said the captain.

The procedure reversed itself.

Everyone tried to catch his eye.

"Lieutenant Hill, you must remain, of course," said Crisp. Hill merely nodded. If the captain was going, Hill clearly had to remain. "I'll give you orders in writing." In case he didn't come back, but there was no need to say that. "I won't take a lieutenant," the captain went on. "Neston, you're in. And Gladwin. Neston, please select seven men. I'd like two corporals among them."

No one said anything, but everyone realized that the captain had been guilty of human feelings. A lieutenant should have gone on such an expedition, but the ship's complement was four. With James gone, Hill in temporary command of the ship, and Cutter—the middle-aged woman Gladwin had first seen at his conventional trial—needed as navigator, the only lieutenant left was the captain's daughter. So he took no lieutenant. Anne bit her lip, but there was nothing to say.

Gladwin was surprised that he was included. There were plenty of other sergeants. He was under no delusions about the trust placed in him. His discovery of the spy meant nothing, for after the matter had been considered more calmly, it was obvious to everyone, as it had been to him from the beginning, that Thomson had not necessarily been a Wrecker.

In fact, as Anne had remarked to him, he was making himself a little too conspicuous. Why take him on

this trip if he was still under suspicion?

Then he realised that he was going *because* he was under suspicion. The captain would see he had no opportunity to do any damage, and would be able to see his reactions.

"IT can't be as easy as this," Captain Crisp murmured. He was confiding his fears, strangely enough, to Gladwin. Neston was flying the machine, and in that ill-assorted party as regards rank the captain could only talk to Gladwin.

"I'm afraid you're right, sir," said Gladwin.

The Wreckers' base could only be under an overhang at the foot of the thickly-wooded mountain. It was almost dusk and the helicopter was using the P-ray—the whole skin of the vessel was enveloped in a refracting field that bent all light rays round the ship and straightened them out again. So it couldn't be seen. The squeaker was on too—a sort of relay station that soaked up radar beams, modified and sent them on in such a way as to convey the lie at the other end that there had been no interruption. So the helicopter couldn't be detected, unless the Wreckers had something a long way ahead of current science. Moreover, the funk-relay was on. Any moment that something the relay didn't like or understand happened—a particle bombardment, entry into a live field of force, the hundred other things that could mean danger—the heli-

copter would instantly be wrapped in the effective, but noisy, sound shield and would be shooting up on an erratic course with all the power of vanes and jets.

But no one seemed interested. A ship had landed. They had seen it because even the P-ray can't hide exhaust fumes. It could only be under that overhang. And round about were no roads, no tracks, no guards, nothing.

"Could be," said the captain, "that there's no real defense but a good hiding-place. But this ray, whatever it is that kills through all defenses—why doesn't it surround the base? The P-ray and the squeaker are well enough known. But they let us come down and see exactly where their base must be, and nothing has happened. Suppose we drop an atom bomb on the mountain—what's to stop us? It will do a lot of damage in New Paris and Media, but that can't be helped."

He looked broodingly at Gladwin. "What would you do, sergeant?"

It was without precedent. No captain conferred with a sergeant. Gladwin answered warily. "How do you see the alternatives, sir?"

"We either drop right down and have a look under that overhang, or go back to the ship and drop a bomb."

"Then we obviously go back to the ship, sir."

"That being so, I think we'll drop and have a look."

So that was it. Anne had given him fair warning. The captain was using him as a sort of weather cock—or pretending to.

Gladwin looked round. No one else could hear them. The captain wouldn't have talked as he had otherwise. Gladwin might be a spy, but he was certainly a sergeant in the navy.

"I see your point of view, captain," he said. "But I know you won't do the wrong thing merely because I, under suspicion, don't want you to do it."

"No," said the captain moodily. "But I wish I knew about you, Gladwin."

"So do I sir, but what can I say or do? Whatever I tell you, you can believe me or not. But since we're talking informally, sir, do you mind if I'm frank?"

"I'd be glad of it," Captain Crisp said drily.

"As I see it, sir, you can only do two things with me. Lock me up as a suspected spy, or trust me. If I'm a spy, you've put me on my guard now. If I'm not, and you lock me up . . ."

"Yes?" the captain prompted. "Will it really make much difference?"

"I think it might. I'm a man of ideas, sir, and I'm beginning to get one now."

The captain smiled mirthlessly. "You don't underestimate yourself, anyway, Gladwin," he observed.

"No, sir. I think that's always a

bad mistake."

"All right. I'll trust you. Tell Neston to return to the ship."

THE *Arachnid* was slowly edging over the foot of the mountain. With her drive on, the ship could have covered a million miles in the time it was taking her to edge two. But the drive couldn't be concealed. So the helicopter was towing the ship into position for her attack.

Lieutenant Crisp found Gladwin in the rear control room—merely an emergency installation in the rear of the ship in case the forward part was damaged.

"I see you're trusted now," she remarked informally. "Or else someone forgot you."

Gladwin looked round at her, frowning.

"You were here alone. You could have given us away to the Wreckers, if you liked. Or damaged the ship." She looked keenly at him, looking suddenly very like her father. "If you were a spy you would have done, wouldn't you?"

"No," said Gladwin.

"Why not?"

"Because if I did, Sub-lieutenant Neston would come out from behind that bulkhead and say 'Caught red-handed!' or words to that effect."

There was a muffled curse from behind the bulkhead indicated. Anne grinned. "You may as well come out, Neston," she said. The sub-

lieutenant appeared, looking sheepish. "It's not your fault. Gladwin has second sight or something."

"When does the bomb go?" Gladwin asked.

"Any minute now."

Gladwin jerked his head up. "So soon? I thought—Anne, I've thought of something. I want to see your father."

"You can't. He's busy."

"Lieutenant Crisp," said Gladwin formally, and saluted. "I request an immediate interview with the captain."

Anne refused to be formal. She shrugged. "It's your funeral," she said. "He won't like it."

"Maybe he will."

In two minutes he was saluting the captain.

"You again," said Crisp.

"Yes, sir. I get around." He went on rather incoherently. "Sir, I told you I had ideas. I think I know what the Wreckers' weapon must be. You know naval vessels never fly in line, always in echelon. That's what started the train of thought. And the fact that the Wreckers' field, whatever it is, doesn't surround the base. I—"

The rush of words stopped. This was formal, not like the conversation on the helicopter. He couldn't go on as Sergeant Gladwin.

The captain smiled involuntarily. "You're a cheeky devil, Gladwin," he observed. "All right. You're promoted acting sub-lieutenant."

"First, may I suggest that you

send Lieutenant Crisp to delay dropping the bomb for a while, sir?" said Gladwin.

The captain frowned. Gladwin went on hurriedly. "I think it will fail, and I believe you do, too, sir. The Wreckers, apart from their one weapon, probably aren't far ahead of us—but there's no reason why they should be behind. They must be covered by a sound shield. Which means the bomb will only let them know we're here and give them a chance to escape."

"And do you think they'll succeed?"

"Yes, sir. They must have several ships. If four or five come darting out, what are you going to do? Whether they fight or run, I doubt if we'll get more than one of them before they get us. The second thing you can do is wait—but I think you know that as soon as Lieutenant James gets to Fettenburg the Wreckers will be warned."

"So?"

"Attack now, sir, but not with the bomb. Listen—we were able to get down close, and as you said, nothing happened. They wouldn't let anyone do that if they could stop it. Therefore their weapon has a limitation. Maybe it needs too much power. Maybe it causes a disturbance that all Venus would detect. Or—maybe it doesn't work in air."

"What's that?" Crisp demanded.

"Remember, sir, it's only been used in space. If they don't use it here, it may be that it can only be

used in space. When I thought of that I wondered what else there was that could only be used in space. I remembered the old warp drive. But about the bomb, sir?"

"Very well." The captain turned to Anne. She gave the order through the intercom without leaving the room. Then she turned to Gladwin.

"You remembered the old warp drive," she murmured. "I thought you didn't know anything about spaceships, let alone their history?"

"I know the engines. I've always been a mechanic. There's not an engine, using any form of fuel, that I don't know something about. Anyway, remember the warp drive? You never saw it used, it's been obsolete for a long time now. But it only worked in space."

They frowned at him, Anne again looking very like her father.

"I know I don't think the usual way," Gladwin admitted cheerfully, "but it's the only way I can explain this—tell you how I thought of it. You know the tradition about flying in line?"

"Naturally," said the captain. "But that's just an old tradition."

Gladwin grinned. "I never thought there would come a time when I'd point out that there's always something behind every tradition," he said. "I think if you investigated, you'd find that tradition dated from the time of the warp drive."

The captain was lost, and beginning to get impatient. But Gladwin went on:

"When I got the idea, I looked back in the records in the library to see if there was anything to support it. There was, a little. A naval vessel rammed another once by accident, and everyone in the vessel that it struck died. Curious, since it wasn't much of a crash. There is some record of an investigation, but not what it revealed. Since the Wreckers' weapon is known only to them, I'd say it revealed nothing and was forgotten. But the tradition remained. It wasn't safe to get into a warp area in front of another ship."

"You mean," exclaimed Anne, "that the warp itself is the weapon? That an extended field would kill everyone as the Wreckers do?"

"I do."

"But—proof!" exploded Crisp. "Is this just a piece of imagination? You think it might be so, so you say it probably is?"

"Exactly," Gladwin admitted. "Can anyone else do any better? Anyway, if you want proof, you can have it. I've tried it out."

"Oh." The captain became excited. "That's different. Why didn't you say so? You've tested a warp field?"

"I killed a couple of mice with a warp field two inches by three by three."

"Then we can use the Wreckers' own weapon against them?"

"No. It only works in space, and there's a lot of thick Venusian air about. I had to depressurize the first

mouse, put a bag over its head and put it in a vacuum. But it wasn't the vacuum that killed it, it was the warp field."

"But the passengers on ships attacked by the Wreckers weren't in a vacuum," Anne objected.

"No. Hence the second mouse. I put him in a little cylinder and put it in the vacuum. When the field closed round the cylinder, the mouse died. You know what the warp is? Basically, it enables a ship to suck itself through space. The drive makes a warp in space in front of the ship, a warp that has to be filled up pretty damn quick. What is it? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The warp is to space as space is to air. Space, which is nothing, has to fill up the warp, through which no electrical impulses can pass, and in which, we now know, nothing can live, even for an instant. The warp and space are two different kinds of nothing. Maybe there are a lot more."

"But why wasn't this known?" Anne demanded.

"How should I know? No one ever succeeded in projecting the field further than the thirty yards the ships used as a warp. That seemed to be the natural limit. So it wasn't much of a weapon, since it could only be used in space, was only effective if it surrounded an object, and could only be extended for thirty yards. But the Wreckers must have found out how to extend it for miles."

He concluded: "All that matters now is that the Wreckers can't use it on us so long as we stay low. It has nothing to do with the plan I suggest, which is this."

They didn't listen quietly. Sometimes they agreed, sometimes disagreed violently. But in the end they were satisfied on one point. If Gladwin's plan didn't work, they knew nothing else that would.

FROM the direction of New Paris a helicopter was racing nowhere in particular. Presently it turned in a wide circle.

Flying it, Gladwin wondered, now that it was too late, if there had been a better plan. He didn't like this one. It wasn't so much a plan as a wild guess.

Would the Wreckers be curious enough? Would they wonder what had made one machine, following a course so erratic, and yet so regularly erratic, come close to a base which might have remained undiscovered for years?

Or would they be coldly reasonable, destroy it and forget all about it?

That was item one. Gladwin raced on again and went into another wide circle, making a pattern in the sky. By now they must be watching him. He wondered when they would see that his pattern would bring him in sight of their base, and whether they would take action before it did.

They didn't. They waited until he saw the cave and whirled in the

air to have a good look. He looked into the base—a vast cave hewn from the mountain. He counted seven ships, and exulted. This wasn't *one* of the Wreckers' bases—it was *the* base, and whatever happened, they weren't going to use it much longer.

But the Wreckers had lost bases before and it made no difference to them. They were prepared, apparently, to go on making and losing bases, one every six months or so. No, there was no victory in finding the base. It should have been found long before now.

Something caught the helicopter and shook it like a rat. Gladwin knew he was in the grip of the tractor beam, and any moment the helicopter be dragged into a cave or torn apart in the air. But it was a relief that it was only a tractor beam. He could go too low for that.

He dropped, and the shaking stopped. The Wreckers had no intention of allowing their tractor installation to be torn to pieces by focussing it on a mountain or a forest.

But Gladwin had been too long in the beam and dropped too swiftly. The helicopter would have landed safely if the ground had been ten feet lower. As it was he wrecked the machine.

Gladwin was unhurt. He knew how to crash a machine. He had been flying helicopters for a long time, if not naval models. He was out at once and running.

It wasn't his exertions which made him sweat. It was the knowledge that he might die at any moment in any one of a hundred different ways—and there was no reason why he shouldn't, except his trust in chance.

He shot a glance behind him and saw men streaming from the Wreckers' base. So far, so good.

Then came part two. As the Wreckers streamed out into the open, the *Arachnid* shot into view from nowhere, guns blazing. Scores of men died before they could take cover. Others, trying to run back to the base, made about ten yards and then crumpled.

Gladwin realized his personal danger was almost over. He dropped behind a vast root of a Venusian molan tree and watched. He was only about three hundred yards from the Wreckers' base. The *Arachnid* was boring in at it now, all her armament in action.

But a ship can either attack or defend—not both. The *Arachnid's* screens were down to let her own barrage through. And the screens of the base were holding. There was no reply—yet.

Suddenly the Wreckers' defense ended. They blazed into attack. For two minutes that seemed like hours the ship and the base in the mountain slung everything they had at each other. One of the ships in the cavern became incandescent and then subsided, as if it were made of melting ice. The naval vessel was

hovering only fifty feet from the ground, pouring everything she had into the cavern.

But if the *Arachnid* had vast power for her weight, the Wreckers didn't have to bother about weight. There was only one outcome. And as if the *Arachnid* realized it, she suddenly darted forward at the cavern, ready to ram it if all else failed.

It only gave the Wreckers a better chance to throw everything they had at her. The dark hull glowed crimson suddenly, then white. And the *Arachnid* crashed just outside the cavern, the white hull changing to orange, then fiery red.

The Wreckers had a plan worked out to the last detail. No time was wasted on the *Arachnid*. No one went near the fallen ship. Even if the men inside weren't dead, they were harmless until the fused hull cooled and they could cut their way out. That would take at least five hours. The Wreckers knew that, and they were right.

Inside the cavern the Wreckers were trooping into the six remaining ships. It was all orderly and systematic, and it went beautifully. There must have been over a thousand of them, but within twenty minutes the ships were ready to take off. The first began to edge past the dead *Arachnid*.

Then the real attack came.

Gladwin had known that the *Arachnid* could do nothing against the Wreckers in their base, except

force them to leave it. But now the big tractors and energy beams and sound-shield projectors lay dead about the floor of the cavern, hastily destroyed by the escaping Wreckers. They had only the normal armament of six ships—and six ships, moreover, which were on ground, not their natural element.

The Wreckers must have been surprised at such an attack by one ship. But with their espionage system as it was, it had had to be one ship or nothing.

The *Arachnid* had been a beautiful ship. One man could control it. It had not needed many men to make the ferocious attack that ended with the ship lying helpless before the Wreckers' base. The rest, and all the ship's portable armament, had been landed long before.

The fire came from Gladwin's right. The Wreckers, now that it was obvious that a planned attack had been made, should have known better than to try to escape to the left, past the wrecked battleship.

Defense is never far behind attack in the development of new techniques. The sound shield was so complete an answer to the use of atomic power that it was only effective as a surprise attack. Atomic power wasn't used now.

But if the course of any moving object can be predicted, a pretty hot barrage can be arranged. The men from the *Arachnid* had known exactly where the first vessel would go. It was no wonder it dropped in

a blaze like that of the naval ship itself, and only a few score yards from it. What had hit it was a beam which would have done no harm in a second, or ten seconds, but which must inevitably turn it to incandescence if it could be held for a full minute. That beam had finished the *Arachnid*, used by the Wreckers, and used by the men from the *Arachnid* it finished the second Wrecker ship.

Then the Wreckers realised the purpose of the fire from the right. It was partly to direct their route of escape. But its main purpose was to bring the roof of the cavern down. There was the first sign of panic in the ranks of the Wreckers. Two ships tried to rise together and too rapidly, and crashed into each other. That helped, Gladwin thought. Not so much because the two ships were damaged, but because their fall must have weakened the structure of the cavern.

Rocks began to fall. The disadvantage of the tractor was that it could only pull slightly less than its own weight at best. Therefore, heavy as the units from the *Arachnid* were, they could focus only weak beams on the roof of the cavern. But only weak beams were needed.

Another ship rose, still inside the cavern, and almost made its escape. But it lingered too long. Six energy beams fastened on it and held it. It needed time, and it had to stab back with its own weapons. This entailed dropping the shield. It had time for one wild attack on the men

on the ground—an attack which would have finished them if it had been properly directed.

But when the first attack failed, it had time for no more. It became the third ship to blaze and drop to the ground.

The crash of that ship must have done it. Great blocks of rock began to fall. Then, it seemed, half of the mountain dropped. The tractors were off now. The cataclysm, properly started, gathered momentum.

The Wreckers' base was buried. But the mountain took a long time to settle. The navymen did nothing to help it. It was impossible to take chances with the Wreckers. Later someone would ask why they took no prisoners. But not now.

It took Gladwin and the two parties only ten minutes to cut a section out of the *Arachnid's* hull. He counted the men who came out—nine, ten, eleven. Only two missing, left where they fell. Had they beaten the Wreckers with only two casualties?

Not yet. There were at least two hundred men alive in the other ship, only a few yards away, and it was anybody's guess how many remained in the mountain. They couldn't take chances.

It was as inhuman, really, as anything the Wreckers had ever done themselves. If the Wreckers had not had such a reputation of invincibility, perhaps the crew of the *Arachnid* would have taken prisoners.

As it was, they planted a bomb

in the rubble of the mountain and made for New Paris. There would be no sound shield operating now.

They could only have been ten miles away, two hours later, when the world rocked

"There will be the devil to pay over that," Captain Crisp gasped. "What it must have done in New Paris and Media . . ."

"Think of what it must have done to what was left of the Wreckers," said Gladwin, and remembered, very late, to add "sir." "Besides," he went on, "you were going to drop a bomb anyway, sir, weren't you?"

The world was beginning to settle a little. The party from the *Arachnid* had taken a course to place two hills between themselves and the explosion. They could only have an idea of the devastation they had left behind them. But they knew there couldn't be much left of Mount Philippa—and nothing at all of the Wreckers.

Crisp surveyed Gladwin thoughtfully. "I expect they'll make you an admiral," he remarked.

"How do you do it, Gladwin? Is it blind luck?"

Gladwin grinned. "Just trust in tradition, sir," he said.

Anne, who was just ahead of them, jumped spasmodically at that. She wasn't neat now. She was grimy and hot. She had been in charge of the party operating the tractors, and it had been heavy work and a man's job.

"Tradition!" she exclaimed.

Crisp grunted and went on, leaving them to fight it out. The word seemed to be the keyword in a private battle, and his authority as far as Gladwin was concerned seemed to have been weakened enough already.

"Sure," said Gladwin. "Curiosity is traditional. When the Wreckers destroyed the helicopter and I started to run, they should have shot me. But no—they were curious. They had to take me prisoner and question me. So they let their screen down and ran out to capture me. I didn't take much of a chance. I knew they would. 'Take him alive' is a tradition. That gave the *Arachnid* its opportunity. Then when they were escaping, they destroyed their defenses. Traditional again. Never leave anything for the enemy—even if he has plenty himself and it doesn't matter a damn. So they couldn't come out of their ships and

hold us off again. Then —"

"All right, save the rest. I still wonder if you're lucky or brilliant."

"A bit of both, I expect," said Gladwin modestly. "There's another tradition . . ."

"Yes?"

"After an affair like this, it would be in the best traditions if you and I got married."

"I don't think," said Anne sarcastically, "that I'm in your class, Gladwin. You'd be marrying beneath you. I'll be a lieutenant for a while yet, and as Captain Crisp says you'll be an admiral in no time, or less."

"Well, at least," said Gladwin mildly, "tradition demands that you kiss me and call me Alan."

"That doesn't strike me as impossible," said Anne.

Two minutes later she murmured: "I wonder why some people always get what they want, Sub-lieutenant Gladwin?"

The End

Here It Is . . . That SPECIAL Issue !

Some time ago—quite some time ago, in fact, we promised you readers a really *special* issue of OTHER WORLDS. Something new, something different, something entirely out of the ordinary.

Well, we've been working on it ever since, and we finally have it ready for you. What is it? For a detailed answer to that question, make a mental note right now to beg, borrow or even buy the next issue of OTHER WORLDS. That's the June 1952 OTHER WORLDS, on sale (we hope) March 28th.

The Editors



"And now, your idea of the perfect woman . . . " I asked

The GUARDIAN of EDEN

By Richard Ashby

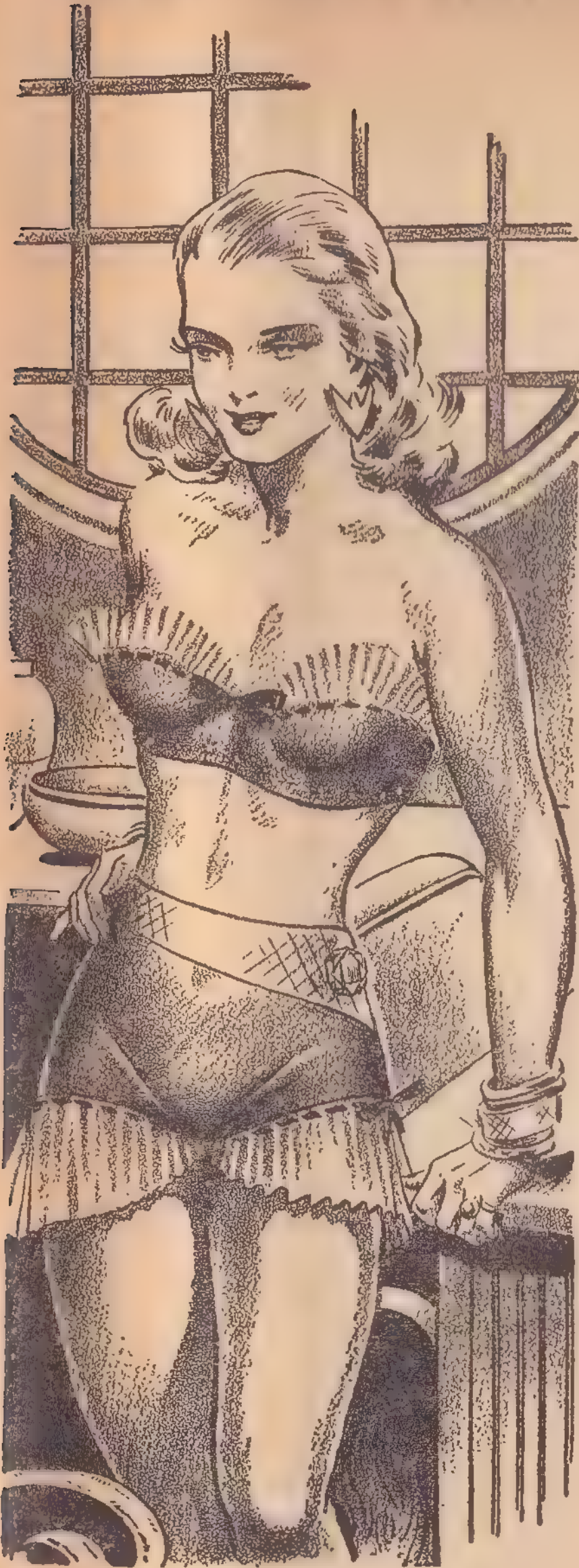
Illustration by Joe Tillotson

If the loveliest woman you have ever seen is an android, and you want to kiss her, do you have to turn off her switch? Which has nothing (much) to do with a play-actor quelling a revolution!

Heral Smith Agency,
Professional Bldg.,
Port Luna.

Hello, friend Herald:

I can think of no better way to begin this account of my latest triumph than with a statement of Churchill's. — the Englishman who left a throne for love, I believe. He said: "It is better to be making the news than taking it; to be an actor rather than a critic." How true. But to be both! To be the actor who makes news! And not simply news in the world of Art and the Theatre — for that you have no doubt come



to expect of me. It would be "old hat and coat" as the ancients of King Churchill's era would put it.

This time I have been backstage of the Galaxy's great Play, amidst the sordid and dangerous scene-shifting called Politics. So for reasons which will presently become apparent you are not to carry this letter about with you or show it to friends, as you might possibly wish to do. It is to go immediately into the file marked "J. Marty Reed" . . . another in the series of my writings which will some day chronicle, in my biography, an important slice of this 23rd century's Artistic and Intellectual life.

One aside before I proceed: You know, Heral, how I and all other sensitive, creative people detest haggling over money. Why, therefore, do you continue to plague me about that check? If the bank at New Ellay does not wish to honor it, then I shall take my business elsewhere. I shall get off a tart note to them when I have finished this letter to you. And as for your hundred stellars—you may deduct that from whatever we make on the sale of my revised manuscript "Flamingo Dream". Surely the play will now find a publisher or a producer. The firm of Samuel French would snap at it. Some action, please, Agent mine!

But enough of commercialism . . .

I should begin, I suppose, with a word picture of Eden Jones; her eyes, her voice, her measurements,

but everything actually started three days before her arrival on the scene. We had shuddered out of drive (I insist you get us something more suitable than this creaking 200-footer) and were picking our way through the outermost 'roids of the Plymouth cluster. As is my custom I assembled the cast in the lounge and told them something of the place we were to play. Although some few of them seemed to profess by their negligent attitudes they considered my words a waste of their good time I went gamely ahead and considered the herculean task that had been accomplished some hundred and fifty years before when the swarm of dwarf matter appeared at the edge of the System and was tugged in near Sol and carved into clusters of little planetoids. And of the largest of them, Tombola. Tombola! What a name to conjure with! Opening my Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations", forty-sixth edition, I read the immortal words voiced by Gunnar Krantz when he had finished giving an atmosphere to the huge new 'roid: "This ain't gonna be no foam, makin' a real world of this chunk'a junk. It'll be a regular game of Tombola, so all you pioneers better think it over good before drawin' your land lots."

As I was winding up my remarks the pilot boat was sighted.

"Ship 'Thespis'," called our speaker. "From where to where?"

"Out of New Ellay, Earth," answered my pilot, "for Tombola."

A short laugh issued from the speaker. "Why?"

By this time I had made my way to a phone. "We come at the invitation of the president, Lon Fleming," I informed the fellow curtly. "There are twelve of us. My pilot, my actors, and myself, J. Marty Reed. We are Life Players."

"Your funeral," said the man on the pilot boat.

As I mulled over his comment, a segment of space beside the craft lighted up red with the words "Follow Me", and the ship turned about on its axis.

For twenty minutes we dropped down into the thick of the cluster, past 'roids of every size, from tiny chunks holding but a single farm or two, on up to great sparkling cities. But Tombola was the largest of them all. My copy of Space Almanac states that it's roughly the size of Ireland, with a population of almost a million.

The pilot boat led us into the Capitol beam when we were still some hundred miles off the 'roid and stood by while we tuned in and locked our hold. "Slide, 'Thespis'," said the speaker, and the words beside the boat winked out and were replaced with a green "Bye".

Pride denied my asking the other craft why they'd termed our coming engagement a funeral, but I confess I was nettled. Not worried or frightened, you understand—concerned. For my actors. But at closer sight of Tombola all worries faded.

What a beautiful vista lay ahead, growing rapidly through the huge lounge windows, showing rivers and lakes and scores of glistening towns. When we entered the 'roid's atmosphere, ten miles out, the air about us fairly danced with ships: Gravity sleds, mostly, and several freighters drifting out, probably with cargoes of the precision machinery for which Tombola is noted.

I tore myself from the vista and made a little inspection of my actors. "Neatness counts," I told them. "First impressions!"

Two men needed shaves, I found, and Gloria, my leading lady, wasn't dressed to suit me. "It may be the latest thing on earth, dear, but it might be a bit brief for here. You wouldn't want the president of all Tombola to be shocked, would you?"

Rather rudely she complained that I might have taken the trouble to get a Mores Check on the place before landing. I admit she had a point, but those infernal behavior and attitude handbooks cost money; and besides, they're out of date so quickly.

"It's always better to offend with too much than too little. Now run along and put on a nice cloak, Gloria."

When she had left, and after the others passed inspection, I hurried to my stateroom to dress: Black velvet leotards, a crimson half-cape, and pink slippers . . . and I confessed to my reflection that J. Marty

Reed cut quite a figure. As I was putting on a fine-smelling lotion, the ship jarred to a landing.

Gloria needn't have bothered about her cloak. The citizens of Tombola turned out to be nature enthusiasts, and only the essential minimum of their bodies was clothed. Physically, they were an attractive people, these descendants of pioneers; tall and tan, with brown and blond hair predominating. But I caught many faces set in expressions of dejection—or perhaps only fatigue.

After rushing back into the ship and changing my leotards for shorts, I herded my little group through customs. We were past quickly and given our medical Ok, and into a sled for the President's Villa, a quick ten miles away.

It was a disappointingly modest affair of grey stone that rambled up over a little hill and piled itself to a halt before a grove of Eucalyptus.

"Are you sure this is it?" I asked our driver.

"The Servant's place?"

"Certainly not! I told you to take us to the Presidential Mansion."

My man floated us to a stop at the entrance deck. "You're strangers, huh? Well, this is it, but Lon Fleming doesn't like being called 'President'. He's the 'Servant'. Servant of the People, get it?"

I mused the title over a little. "How quaint. Yes, of course. The ultimate public servant. I rather like it."

"Yeah," commented the driver flatly.

We were met by lackeys and ushered into the building. Inside it was neither lavish nor severe, but a neutral meeting of the two. Comfortable, perhaps, but rather colorless.

An attendant whispered to me that the Servant was by the window. Looking over, I saw a heavy little man in tan trunks regarding us. "Your honor," I began, but the attendant nudged me. Sotto voce he told me to call him simply Lon.

"It is indeed a pleasure, Lon, to be granted an appearance before you. I, J. Marty Reed, for myself and on behalf of my cast, am indeed—"

"I didn't send for you, Reed," said the little man. "One of my damned advisors did. He thought I needed recreation. But as long as you're here, I guess you might as well get at it. Will this room do? I've got a couple of spare hours. Let's go!"

Horried, I began explaining how a group of Life Players function. "We simply can't pitch into things this quickly, Lon, sir. I've got to set up screens to watch my people, choose plays and a cast that will appeal to you, see to costumes. Hardly, my dear sir. Oh, no."

"Oh, hell." The Servant twiddled with some papers on his desk. "How long will it take you to get ready?"

"A couple of days at the least, sir."

"And how many of your perform-

ances am I supposed to have contracted for?"

The man's manner was infuriating, but I held myself in check. "We are to play for you a minimum of three times. If by then you do not wish more, you are entitled to dismiss us. But that is a rare occasion, indeed. Everyone who sees us begs for more. Why, on Venus, once—"

"Yes, I'm sure of that." The Servant sighed coldly. "You say you Life Players perform for just one person, eh? Seems rather a waste."

"But that's the beauty of it. When the audience is composed of a single person, then the actors are able to use all of Tombola for a stage. You tag along after them, an eavesdropper as it were. A peeping tom."

"Sounds vaguely indecent." He ran his fingers through his sparse hair. "Well, as long as you're here on this 'roid you might as well earn your money. I'll expect you two nights from now."

I bowed graciously. "Thank you, Lon. I won't disappoint you. The group of J. Marty Reed is one of the most popular in the System. Once, on Mars, we—"

"That's all." Turning to an aide he waved tiredly. "Show them out. Get them to quarters somewhere. Do something with them. I've got work. Work, work."

Outside again the attendant informed me that Lon Fleming would be a difficult man to please. "He's so tied up in the business of serving the 'roid that he never really stops

working at it. The entire Mesta Committee has been—"

"The what?"

"Mesta. Party committee. We've been after him for months to take a vacation, or to at least see some entertainers." He opened the door to a cab. "You'll be doing Tombola a great service if you can relax him. There are grave issues facing our Cluster."

I assured him the future was in good hands and herded my group into the sled. "Where are we staying?"

"I've engaged rooms for you at the best hotel. The driver knows where it is. Anything you want, any work done or advice, just call and ask for Joker. That's me. I'm the official fixer and greeter here." He waved and our cab whined off.

In a rather dismal frame of mind I considered the situation. The Servant would be a mighty tough audience. We would be fortunate to give four performances for him . . . hardly over our expenses. My actors—a money-hungry lot—would insist on their back pay. The pilot was already clamoring for a raise, and creditors from three planets were yapping at my heels about bills for costumes and props and electrical equipment.

Poor J. Marty Reed, I thought. My eyes misted as I gazed unseeingly down at the city beneath us and pondered the dark times in which the Theatre had entered. The weight of my worries and responsi-

bilities would make an old man of me before I was eighty.

OUR hotel rooms were encouraging, however. Graceful and airy, they occupied the entire tenth floor of a slender shaft of a building that soared high above the center of town. There were few other guests in sight. I spoke of this to a bell boy.

He shrugged.

"Aren't there many visitors to Tombola?"

"Ain't allowed. The Un-Tombola Activities Committee nixed it two years ago." He paused at the door. "That be all?"

I nodded. He cleared his throat. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

"Nothing, mister. Thanks. Thanks a lot. And if you need anything at all, just call for Fred."

"I will, Fred."

"My name ain't Fred." He shut the door noisily behind him.

After we had dined together in my spite, I gave each of my troupe four stellars. "Now go out and have a good time this evening. See the town. Buy things. And don't worry about me. Old J. Marty's going to think things through somehow."

I had supposed that among them there would be one with the courtesy to thank me for my bounty, or to at least ask me along. But no. With odd glances at the money I had handed them, they filed from the room.

I thought things over in solitude

for a while with only a glass of Martian brandy for company. It cheered me, somewhat, so I had a couple more and eventually began to see things in their proper perspective. Had J. Marty Reed ever been stopped before? Hadn't he always figured a way out of the difficulties that beset him? Would he be downcast?

After answering these questions correctly, I jumped into fresh clothes. Something fine and exciting and noble awaited me outside in the city. I could feel it!

With unerring instinct, I located a tavern and after introducing myself to those seated near me, and buying them drinks, soon had a cozy little party going.

It is possible that I indulged in too much, or—more likely—that I encountered some beverage unsuited to my constitution. At any rate, I do not recall too much of the ensuing evening.

There was a brief shopping trip with one of my companions — a young lady whom I remember promising to make an actress. She allowed me to buy her a trinket or two in a jewelry shop. And I dimly recollect purchasing some books for myself in a mammoth department store.

THE following morning I awoke to the horrendous sound of splintering wood, and leaping from my bed I tottered into the adjoining room. Two roughly dressed men

were ripping open a crate, half as tall as they.

"Larson's Department Store," one greeted me, and jabbed at the box with a bar. With one hand I held on the top of my head and waved them away with the other.

"I'll open it, thanks. Just go please, gentlemen."

One of them grinned. "Tough night, huh?"

"Nothing of the sort. I'm ill."

"I'll bet you are at that. Well, if you want to tackle this yourself—" He picked up his tools and they left.

Trembling, and wracked with a horrible thirst, I inspected the box. The lid was half off, and inside I could make out books, pottery, a dozen or so bottles of brandy, and at the bottom, another crate.

It was beyond me to attend to it all at the moment, so calling in one of my actors to unpack, I drank a quart of water and struggled into my clothes.

"You must have struck it rich, Marty," said Peter, the boy who was unpacking. "There's about a thousand stellars of stuff here."

I froze in the act of brushing my hair. "That's impossible. I didn't have fifty with me last night."

"Come see for yourself, then."

I did.

He was wrong. There was a sales slip attached to the inner side of the crate showing that I, J. Marty Reed, had assigned the ship "Thespis" to the store in lieu of a payment of fifteen-thousand stellars.

Our ship! I tore off the slip before Peter saw it.

"What's this at the bottom?" he asked, still digging around in the crate. "Heavy, too." He hauled it out and lowered the box to the floor. "'Link Literary Preference Analyzer'," he read. "May I open it?"

Dumbly, I nodded. Fifteen-thousand stellars!

Peter pried back the lid and lifted out a shiny helmet with wires that led back to a black metal case. From the case stuck an inch-wide ribbon of paper.

And I remembered!

"Great gimmick," I said, smiling bravely. "They use it in book stores to see what kind of reading will please you. You put the helmet on, then someone asks you questions about your life and your likes and dislikes. The answers come out on the tape."

Peter squatted by the machine, frowning thoughtfully. "You know how to work one?"

"Naturally, my boy." My voice was a bit shrill. I lowered it. "Naturally."

"But what are you going to use it for?"

I remembered that, too. "I was buying a few books, last night, and as they were using it on me, I suddenly thought a great thought. Suppose I buy one and have clients run through a test before we put on our dramas. We couldn't fail to please."

The idea still seemed sound.

"Ummm," said Peter. "Where'd

you get the money?"

"An impertinent question, young man. I had it all along."

"Then why haven't you paid us, Marty? You owe everybody in the group money."

I raised one hand to my forehead. "Please, boy, don't torment me just now. There's too much work to do for us to be standing about fretting. Screens have to be rigged, cables laid, costumes . . . You know."

"Yeah." Peter stood, brushed off his hands and glared into the larger crate. "And brandy, too. What a guy."

"Take a bottle, please. I . . . uh . . . I got one for everybody."

He left the room without answering, and without accepting my generous offer.

I brooded for a while over a fine breakfast, then resolutely pushing away all thoughts of worry, threw myself into the tasks at hand. There were a thousand things to do: The vision screens had to be set up in my suite, and the eyes installed at the Servant's estate. The tiny speakers that my actors wear, one over each ear, which feed them their lines and stage directions had to be tested, and the mikes and amplifiers checked.

Late that afternoon I broke off and called Larson's Department Store. They were sorry, but the slip I had signed constituted a contract. However, if I wished to appeal the matter, the next court session began in just a few months. And no,

it was not the policy of stores on Tombola to take back merchandise.

"But couldn't I trade this junk for something I might need?"

Again they were sorry, but Section Six, Paragraph 'B' stated that . . .

I gave it up.

After stowing away the brandy in my wardrobe trunk, and arranging the books and the pottery interestingly about my suite, I made a study of the expensive Preference Analyzer. It was a rather complicated little affair; a brain-wave plotter mated to a maze of printed circuits, which—according to the accompanying handbook—filtered out unwanted data and produced a strip of answer tape. The tape was then torn off and checked against a master reference which was alleged to give one a perfect picture of the subject's favorite plot patterns, hero and villain types, and the degree of reality desired—or fantasy, as the case might be.

Quite a machine. I doubted, however, if I would be able to operate it, having all my life concerned myself with matters more spiritual and intellectual than mechanical. But it would make a nice toy to keep as a souvenir of Tombola—assuming we'd ever get off the blasted 'roid.

When twilight began (they do not use night on Tombola, but only dim the atmosphere somewhat) I called a rehearsal, and for five hours drove my people closer to that perfection expected of a troupe directed by J.

Marty Reed. They were not in too happy a mood after our labors, so to reward them I promised to read some of my own poetry aloud. Even this promise brightened them, it seemed, for they ceased their grumblings and went quickly to bed . . . most of them leaving before I'd finished the first stanza of a particularly lovely sonnet. I forgave them, however, for I myself was exhausted. And tomorrow would be an even more grueling day.

It arrived quickly enough.

A bright hot day that sprang into being at exactly eight in the morning, and from then till six, we spent in last minute checks of our equipment, our costumes and effects. At last the moment arrived!

Alone in my rooms, seated before the vision screens that allowed me to watch the performance at the Servant's villa—and surrounded with scripts, hot coffee and cigarettes—I flipped the mike to "general standby" and alerted the cast.

For this first performance, I'd planned to not exceed the boundaries of the servant's estate—it's always wise to feel one's way into the audience before attempting more widespread and difficult ventures over a whole city. The play was one I had authored, and which we'd performed with variations over a score of points in the System. It concerned a young man who meets and falls instantly in love with a pretty young girl. He woos her ardently, but at a family dinner he confesses he is

poor. Her family align themselves against him; the girl is griefstricken, and the boy downcast. He rises to the occasion, however, by thinking up an invention that will cure the common cold. He tries it on the girl's father, a wealthy drug manufacturer who, by chance, happens to be suffering from a cold, and that man, after buying it for an enormous sum, gives them a sweet old-fashioned blessing as they go off on their trial honeymoon.

I've always thought it an ingenious little affair, and this night we performed it exceedingly well. My actors took the cues I whispered into their ears—from ten miles away, responded to the bits of business I made up for them, and dashed about in fine style.

It was well performed, ably directed, of course, and novel; but that boor, that artistically illiterate Servant, had the temerity to phone me afterward and say that it was unsatisfactory. "Atrocious, and fantastically trite," I believe he phrased it. He concluded his remarks by giving me twenty-four hours to leave Tombola. "And if you aren't gone by then, I'll personally see to it that you are repealed."

Luckily for him, he clicked off before I had a chance to display my notorious temper. I dialed immediately for the executive's official greeter and fixer . . . the man known as Joker.

Without hinting that our first night had been received in an un-

kindly spirit, I asked the fellow what it was to be "repealed", as the Servant had put it.

"Repealed? Horrors! Who's going to get it now?"

"But what does it mean, Joker?"

He gave out with a shaky laugh. "A most democratic punishment, understand me. One's breathing right is revoked. The person is repealed. But all the voters of Tombola have to agree. A majority, at least."

I sighed with relief. Even if I were a day or two over my twenty-four hour deadline, the Servant couldn't possibly poll a million people. It was simply a joke, a low figure of speech in my case. I recounted something of what the Servant had shouted, then explained the humor inherent.

"I don't know, Reed. You see, there are only a couple thousand qualified voters on the 'roid. The rest are either under some sort of official suspicion, or haven't yet earned enough to pay the poll tax. They can be rounded up to vote in a hurry. Not only that," he added, "but if the measure comes directly from Lon, most of the voters will ballot to please him. It's the smart . . . I, uh . . . it's the courteous thing to do."

I clicked off. A maggoty little paradise I'd wandered into!

An open box of stim pills caught my eye and I took a few. Not because I feared for my life, you realize, but simply to help me think more swiftly and clearly.

It was obvious, in a while, that

the pills were old, for all I could concentrate on was a picture of poor J. Marty Reed inside an airtight tank, gasping and turning purple and . . .

THIS reverie was, thankfully, interrupted by the arrival of my actors. Gloomy and discouraged, they wandered into my room and discussed their failure. And even now, in the depths of my torment, still further pain was made for me. They agreed unanimously that the Servant was not too unentitled to his opinion of my play. "It's sort of stretching things," admitted my leading lady, Gloria, "to expect an audience to believe a young man, any young man, could whip up a cold cure in a few minutes."

"But other audiences . . . On Ceres and Vesta," I protested.

"Those poor savages," Peter broke in. "Anything would seem good to them. They don't even read, and no television, no radio."

"But . . ."

"And besides," added Gloria, "we could see his reactions tonight. But each time we tried to improve on the script, to take it in some direction that would make him happier, you'd holler at us to get back to the same old story. It's revolting!"

"Yes, but—"

"No buts about it, Marty," said a younger actor, "we're in a damn bad fix. It won't help any for you to sit there defending a script we all know is bad. What we've got to do

is pull in our belts and get the hell off this 'roid, pay or no pay."

So reeling and confused was I that I showed them the contract-bill from Larson's Department Store. It quite effectively silenced all small talk, but for a few nasty moments I thought I might be manhandled. At last, after answering their angry questions and calming them with a few drinks of the Martian brandy, I managed to strike something of the pose so beloved by them all; the debonair and indomitable J. Marty Reed who always figures a way out of difficulties.

"We'll each pitch in enough money to pay the store bill," I announced, dramatically solving the problem.

A grim count of available resources, however showed we had on hand about three hundred stellars.

Silence descended again.

Gloria got up and paced about the room, a lithe tiger in silk and sandals. She stopped by the Link Preference machine. "There's only one thing to do as I see it, folks." She indicated the gadget with a nudge of her toe. "The Servant has to give us another chance. He is also going to submit to a testing by this machine. And you, Marty, are going to learn how to use it. It's worth a try, huh?"

The others agreed, none too hopefully.

"And Marty," Gloria told me grimly, "you are going along with me when I beg for that chance from the Servant. And you're going to

keep your mouth shut for once. You'll say 'yes' and 'no' on cue from me, or we'll let you stay on Tom-bola and choke. Get your cloak."

It was useless to argue, seeing the circle of unfriendly faces about me, so I decided to humor the girl.

Five minutes later a cab deposited us at the entrance deck of the executive mansion, and Gloria began talking her way inside. It was quite a task, and I must admit the girl handled it well.

"But he's still working," protested a flunky.

"He'll see me, darling," crooned Gloria. "Are you certain he didn't send for me?"

"That may be. However—"

"Been to any good repeals lately?" She smiled and put one hand to her throat.

The man swallowed, opened the door. We were handed over to another and higher official. Gloria seemed to size up this man quickly, for she adopted a little girl tone and attitude. "Please, sir, I must see the Servant. We used to be such good friends, but now . . ." She sobbed, and trouser that I am, I supplied a handkerchief without further cue. "But now that I'm . . . I'm . . . Well, he hasn't been around any at all, lately. Just let us in for a few moments, friend. I'm . . ." *sniff*, "really not a . . ." *sniff, sniff*, "bad girl. My father can tell you that."

Solicitude fought with indecision on the official's face for a few sec-

onds before winning over. Then he nodded and led us down a long hall. "He's in there working. Just knock, then go on in. But please . . . in the name of Heaven . . . don't tell him you ever saw me." He patted Gloria's tear-streaked cheek. "I've got a little girl of my own about your age." Then straightening up he turned to me and glared. "A fine father you are, sir!"

When he was gone, Gloria made some repairs on her makeup, then knocked. We entered, as instructed, but I do not mind admitting that my knees trembled. From excitement.

THE Servant was where we had first seen him, standing before a tall open window that gave out on a panorama of his city and his 'roid. When he turned to look at us his face was lined with fatigue and suffering, and his gaze upon us showed his mind to be far away in space and in time.

"Yes?" His voice was distant and polite.

"We beg your forgiveness, Lon," began my actress, "but we had to see you. A terrible mistake has been made." She waited for the outburst, but he remained silent. "That playlet today, sir. You were absolutely correct in your estimation of it, but it was not Mr. Reed's fault, you see. I know we players put on a terribly poor drama, but what else were we to do? The radios that keep us in touch with our director

—" she glanced at me, "failed just after we had begun, and there was nothing for us to do but improvise to the best of our poor ability. We are actors and actresses only . . . not playwrights. And we are utterly dependent on Mr. Reed for our lines. The drama he had intended for you was a noble laughing thing, sir. A great story, filled with song and adventure, and a wonderful love. Instead . . . " She put her hands slowly to her temples. "Instead you saw only what we could devise on the spur of the moment. Mr. Reed accepts your criticism of our poor efforts, sir. He even goes further in his denunciations, and is quite willing to suffer whatever penalties you deem fitting."

She sank into a chair, put her face in her hands. "But he suffers for *our* weaknesses, *our* mistakes, *our* failures. Please give him another chance. Let him show you the calibre of his genius. Punish me, any of the rest of us if you will, but let him go free. He is not yours and mine. He belongs to History!"

I regarded Gloria's grieving features with astonishment. This was *my* girl, I thought. The product of my training, my talent. We were both magnificent!

Lon Fleming turned back to the window. His face hidden to us, he said, "Well, Reed, is what she says true?"

"Yes." I was about to continue, to paint the picture of my mortification, my plans for other plays,

my dreams for the future of the Theatre, when an extremely cruel glance snapped from Gloria's inky-black eyes. I shut up.

"And you have better dramas for me?"

"Indeed, sir. You see . . ." A vicious kick from Gloria's pointed slipper caught my ankle and I subsided again.

"I hope you deserve such devotion as has been shown you here tonight, Reed." Facing us again he appeared to consider the matter. "All right. One more play from you. But it dare not fail. You know that, don't you, man?"

My voice dried up suddenly, so I simply nodded.

Gloria sprang up from the chair. "This is generous of you, Lon. I promise that wherever I go from this moment, people will hear your name from my lips with reverence and love. You are a great man, sir."

The lines of sorrow returned to the Servant's weary face. "No, my child, I am not generous. I am hard and often mistaken, but I would be fair according to what I know and believe."

Leaving my side, Gloria walked to within a few feet of the Servant. "And there is one thing I must discuss with you in private," she told him. "Would you mind leaving us alone, Marty?"

Her voice as she asked me was sweet and pleading, but her face, which only I could see, was as mean as a Martian sand-cat. "Yes, Gloria.

Goodnight, sir." I left the room, not wishing to cause a scene. Her disciplining could come later.

Several times in the next hour as I cooled my heels in the hallway, I was on the point of going back and having it out once and for all with Lon Fleming. "Servant" indeed. He was little more than an old-fashioned tyrant.

For about the hundredth time since beginning my illustrious career as a deep-space impresario, I wished the Dominion of Earth had somehow managed, at that long-ago crisis, to face down the teeming 'roids and maintain military control over them. I'd have a fleet of marines bossing this catchpenny "democracy." They'd show this Servant what it meant to mess with a *cum laude* of California's famous Azusa Little Theatre! I'd . . .

But it was sheer wishful thinking. These days, Earth's Space Patrol is feeble indeed compared to the might of the thousands upon thousands of more or less autonomous 'roids. Tombola alone could probably muster up a more powerful fleet.

I took another tour of the hall, letting my feet click impatiently upon the floor to show them inside I had better things to do than wait on the whim of a woman.

At last Gloria emerged, closed the door quietly behind her. And when I began to speak my questions she warned me to wait till we were outside.

On our cab trip back over the

city she explained that the Servant would be at the hotel in two hours for a testing by the Literary Preference gadget.

"And just how did you manage that?"

Gloria shrugged, folded her arms, and watched our approach to the hotel's landing deck.

"You didn't . . . Gloria! Tell me you didn't have to . . ."

"You fool," she snapped. "Of course not. I merely let him talk. He wanted to talk about Earth and about his acquaintances there, and of the years he spent at Stanford. He's a very unhappy man, Marty. A dictator, maybe, but an unhappy one. I let him cry on my shoulder a bit. Then when he was all softened up, got him to agree to drop in tonight and run through a test."

The cab alighted and we got out. "And, Marty, that machine better do what it's supposed to. I promised him a glimpse of heaven."

NEVER have I spent such a maddening two hours as those which followed. The machine baffled me, I'll admit, and I was forced to relegate the task of its operation to my pilot. I, however, would ask the necessary questions. There were scores of them quoted in the accompanying handbook, and I checked off those I thought would apply, also jotting down some better ones of my own.

Scant moments before the Servant's appointed time a very fright-

ened-looking hotel official showed the head of Tombola into my suite, bowed, mumbled something polite, and eased away.

Lon wasted no time on the courtesies. "Let's get to it, Reed. That clever wench of yours trapped me into this, but my word is my word. So hurry!"

My pilot fitted the man into the helmet, turned on the machine, and I took up the list of questions. When the analyzer glowed its signal that it was warm and functioning, I began: "Kindly think your responses to my questions. Do not speak them. First, what length of drama do you prefer?"

The Servant closed his eyes, frowned.

The machine clicked softly and spewed out a few inches of tape.

"How many actors—under twelve, of course—do you want in the cast?"

Click . . . more tape.

"Can love conquer all?" "Does right make might?" "Is the pen mightier than the sword?"

A yard of white paper ribbon coiled on the carpet beside the machine.

"Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?" "What's your favorite kind of music?" "Do you like dogs?"

From the corner of the room, Gloria frowned impatiently at me, but I forged ahead. One could tell a great deal about a man from whether or not he likes dogs. And if he did—which I doubted—I knew of a terrier I could borrow from

one of the bell boys.

"What was the most enjoyable experience you ever had?"

Click . . . click . . .

"What was the least enjoyable one?" The Servant opened one eye and glared balefully at me.

"How do you construe Villainy?"

"How do you construe Heroism?"

"What kind of man would you like to see as a hero?" "Do you think sex a bore or a blessing?" "What is your ambition in life?"

The machine went 'Brrrrrup' as Lon Fleming put his hands to the helmet and half rose from the chair.

"Please, Lon," said Gloria coming up. "Just a few more questions and you can go home." She patted his shoulder and the analyzer bipped out another inch of tape.

"What sorts of fantasy do you enjoy?"

We had about three yards of answer tape coiled by the machine, and as far as I was concerned it was enough. If I couldn't scribble a playlet from that, I was ready to put on a disguise and leave Tombola by tramp freighter. I closed the booklet, but Gloria spoke—sweetly and a bit smugly: "And in conclusion, sir, please think of your ideal woman . . . the kind you would like to see in the romantic lead."

The Servant pursed his lips thoughtfully and spent a full minute enjoying this one. Tape jogged from the machine in a steady stream, slowed, finally stopped.

Ignoring my magnanimous offer of

a glass of brandy, the Servant grumbled a good-evening and left us. Gloria and my pilot removed the tape and settled down with it and the deciphering booklet.

As the minutes became an hour, and the hour stretched on into another, I dozed by the window over a brandy, dreaming of the triumph that was to come. It was impossible to fail, now, for my ingenious forethought in providing the Analyzer, and our forceful job of persuading the Servant to be tested, utterly guaranteed success. Life was, after all, a very easy thing when one . . .

"Ok, maestro, wake up." A very worried appearing Gloria stood before me with a sheaf of note paper. "You and your Literary Preference gimmick. Take a look!"

I took the papers, the results of the test. A quick perusal showed me that Lon Fleming liked plays about an hour long, with but three or four actors. Right did make might, but there were several paragraphs of qualifications following. Love, the Servant believed, could conquer all, but the pen was definitely less powerful than swords or ray cannon. Our man thought it was better to love and lose than win without having loved, and he liked scores of nostalgic old Earth tunes, as well as melodies whose titles were unfamiliar to me.

I could see nothing amiss. The returns were here and there surprising to me, but hardly alarming. Already a playlet was taking shape in

my nimble brain. "Well?"

"Go on. Read the rest of it." She folded her arms, her lips curled in anger and disgust.

He liked dogs not at all. Ha!

Sex was a mixed blessing, but hardly boring. His most enjoyable experience was seizing control of Tombola during a bloodless revolt of the 'roid's upper House. His least enjoyable memory was . . . What was this? Was of having to use force to keep down the opposition. A short sequence followed, illustrating the fact with an incident in which thirty men had been "eliminated".

Villainy he defined as failure to hold to one's ideals, to weaken, to not follow a courageous course of action. The analysis was a bit confused in his picture of heroes and villains. They both contained a picture of himself.

His ambition? I gasped! The man intended to rule the entire Plymouth cluster of two thousand 'roids, and eventually . . . A concept of Earth was here, but then the pattern broke completely off. That must have been when he jumped from the chair.

I read uneasily on: Lon Fleming could take his fantasy or leave it alone, but if he took it, it concerned himself and . . . a woman concept here, vague . . . heading an entire System as equal ruling partners.

But the worst shock was the final paragraph. Here, in great detail, was described exactly the type of heroine or romantic lead that the Servant

wanted to see. She was a girl of thirty-five or forty; five feet, seven inches tall, and weighed around a hundred and twenty-seven. She was fair of skin, her hair was long, thick, soft, and flaxen. Her face was oval, her bright green eyes quite oriental in their size and their almond slant. Her lips were to be wide in a smile, but almost pouty in repose.

Fine! Great!

And her measurements . . . I dreaded to look.

His heroine had a thirty-nine bust, a twenty-four waist, and thirty-six hips! Small feet, narrow ankles, long legs . . . described in detail.

"Quite a doll, huh, Marty. Going to play her yourself?" Gloria took a vicious hitch at her shorts and stalked from the room.

Poor woman. Gloria was tanned, short, and a perfect thirty-six. With definitely Caucasian black eyes. Hardly the Servant's type.

A final notation to the specifications added that this impossible dream of a woman sang, danced, and played the piano.

It did not, however, say where she was to be found.

"This can't be right," I said hopefully to the pilot who had helped Gloria.

"'Fraid it is, Marty. We checked it three times." He filled a pipe and lighted it. At the door he paused and said between puffs, "And when you locate this dame, call me if she needs anything."

He went out, leaving me with my

misery.

HARDLY had I begun to pour another brandy when he came back.

"This was leaning against your door, Marty. It's addressed to you." He tossed an envelope on the table beside the decanter. I waited for the man to leave, then opened it, my feelings a mixture of curiosity and indifference. Who would be writing poor J. Marty Reed, stranded here at this ignoble outpost of society? And no matter who, what did I care unless they sent money?

No money. An Advertising catalogue. "Jones Robotics, Inc., New York, Earth." The cover showed a grotesque mechanical man astride the world and reaching for the stars. And inside, apparently hand-written, a scrawled notation. "Your name," it read, "has been given us by friends. Your credit rating is excellent, so please do not bother to include any check for a down-payment if you should choose to patronize our firm."

An excellent credit rating? From Earth?

The Gods must be telling shaggy-dog stories tonight!

Further examination of the catalogue showed me that great strides had been made in the last year in robots and androids. For example: "Fool your friends . . . get another *you* . . . and be in two places at the same time." Models of every size were displayed, for ". . . every

purse, every purpose". The firm boasted that their products could even be made to converse intelligently. And all inquiries were to be held confidential, a call placing one under no obligation.

In about three seconds, I was at the phone asking for Bell Earth. The hotel operator wanted to know if I'd talk on modulated radio beam, or the more expensive warp pulse. Having no intention of waiting six or eight minutes for each answer to my questions float out to me from New York, I chose the swifter method—warp pulse, at three stellars a second. I gave her the number.

"Glad to hear from you, Mr. Reed. A pleasure to serve you."

"Uh . . . you've got the right person?"

"We have, if you are the famous playwright and director, J. Marty Reed, now appearing before the president of the 'roid Tombola."

"That is I. And you don't demand a down payment?"

"Your word is your bond, sir."

Hmmm! It was too smooth. I braced myself for the hook. "I've got a very difficult proposition. Just how lifelike are your products?"

"As lifelike as you desire."

"Well, like life, then. You can imitate life?"

"We can surpass it, Mr. Reed. What did you have in mind?"

I told the man, giving the exact specifications from the Servant's dream-requirements.

"No trouble at all. And how do you wish the product dressed?"

"I . . . ah . . . Well, I'll leave that up to you."

"Very good. I'm certain you won't be disappointed. The model will be finished in a few hours, and we'll put it out on special delivery. You should be inspecting it in fifteen to twenty hours. Good to have been of service to you, Mr. Reed. Good bye, sir."

I hung up with the vague feeling of having acted out a part in a fantasy. On Venus I had seen some of the System's finest robots, and while I'll admit they were beautiful, their beauty lay in their shining utility, their air of calm indestructibility and strength. I had seen one in a bar that could mix drinks and sing, and another that could walk about an obstacle-strewn room without blundering, but I had also watched one—a rugged swamp worker—come unzipped and run around in circles till it blew out. And yet the humanoid models in the catalogue resembled nothing quite as much as pictures of scantily garbed men and women—perfect specimens, all.

There was also the matter of my excellent credit rating. True, in Artistic circles the System over, my name *does* demand respect, even adoration, but to the uninformed philistines of the business world . . . hardly.

And why had the catalogue appeared at just *that* moment?

Destiny's way of seeing to her

favorite children?

Perhaps.

Taking the catalogue to bed with me, I fell asleep while reading about platinum-sponge brain and flesh of plastex. And I dreamed frightful episodes in which I was pursued by huge metal dogs who shouted that they were lawyers.

THE following day, taking coffee on the balcony after lunch, I was interrupted by my pilot, Bill. "Well, Reed, much as I detest admitting it, you seem to have pulled it off. Your robot's here."

My hand began trembling and I put down the cup carefully. "Tell me one thing, boy, does it look at all human?"

Bill licked his lips and smiled horribly.

"Well, bring it in. Bring it in."

He went to the door, peered out. "Hey, Impossible. Come on in here, huh?"

It entered onto the balcony, smiling, and I stopped breathing. Accustomed as I am to working closely with beauties from the Theatre world, I have never seen anything in the System that could compare with her. (I stopped referring to her as *it* right then!)

As she crossed slowly over to my table, her walk a sprung, studied rhythm beneath the green gossamer of her cloak, I seemed to hear far-away muted drums keeping time. Then she spoke with a voice that lilted, yet purred, inferring, some-

how, that piquant, magical things could happen to one . . . any moment, now. "Hello, J. Marty Reed. I am android number Seven Sixty-six, series 'C'. Jones Incorporated and I both hope I am satisfactory, sir."

"Duh." It was all I could manage.

"Is something wrong, Mr. Reed?"

"I don't believe it!"

A slight tilt of bewilderment and concern came to the wings of her brows. "I am not what you wanted?"

Young Bill snorted. "If you're not, I'll adopt you, honey."

I didn't like the smile of thanks she flashed him. "You see, Miss . . . uh . . . Seven Sixty-six, it's not that I'm disappointed with you, it's just that I simply cannot believe you're not real."

"Jones Incorporated will gladly make any necessary alterations in me you desire, sir."

My pilot giggled, so I sent him away. "Sit down, Miss . . . I can't keep calling you that number. Haven't you a name?"

Gracefully she took the chair I indicated, and leaning back, crossed one gorgeous honey-tinted knee over the other. "I belong to you. It's your privilege to give me a name if you desire."

I found a stim pill in a pocket while searching for a smoke, swallowed it, then lighted a strong Venusian cigarette. "I'd like to call you Eve, if it weren't so trite."

"Eve?"

"Didn't they teach you about the

Garden of Eden?" She shook her head and the coronet of flaxen braids glinted gold in the sun.

"No matter. It's just as well. There are too many women named Eve. Besides, I don't care for apples. Suppose, though . . . Suppose I call you Eden. You're beautiful enough, child, to have sprung from a legend. Eden. Eden Jones. All right?"

Her generous crimson lips whispered the name twice, then curved into a delighted smile. "You're wonderful, Mr. Reed. It's a fine name. I'm so proud I could kiss you."

My heart surged in confusion. "You kiss, too?"

"But of course. You wanted me lifelike, didn't you?" Taking up my untouched goblet of water, she sipped. "I'm built to do everything a human can do. More, besides."

"Everything?" My voice was a whisper of awe.

"Oh, yes. I can eat, drink. Breathe, too. I'm constructed to breathe all the time. See . . ." Throwing back the top of her cloak, she showed the rise and fall of her splendid chest.

It was quite a demonstration. I shuffled my feet, stirred my cold coffee vigorously. What a *dear* child!

"Of course," Eden continued, "I was a rush job, so it's possible the factory made errors."

"I can see utterly nothing wrong."

She nodded, pouted thoughtfully. "But suppose it's something you

can't see?" Sliding her chair back, she put her hands to the sash of her robe. "We'd better make sure."

"No, no. No, Eden." I patted my brow with a napkin. "No. Just you tell me about it. Your specifications, and . . . uh . . . all."

"Well, I sing, of course. I have a repertoire of a thousand songs; popular, classical, purples, and blues, and can accompany myself on the piano. I dance; ballet, no-grav, and interpretative. An inspector told me they were especially proud of the job they did with my legs." With uncanny ease, she held one elegant limb in the air. "They used special muscles and rigged them not to show, he said. See?"

He was quite right. With fine professional detachment, I took note of the flawless construction, the satiny sheen, the refined symmetry of her slender ankle.

"And except for fire or fluorin solvents," she went on, putting down her leg, "my flesh is guaranteed not to sag or to come unbonded from the aluminum bones."

I didn't care for this clinical aspect. "What about your education, Eden. Are you a high school mentality? College?"

She cocked her head, thought a moment, then shrugged. "They didn't tell me, Mr. Reed. I don't know. But I'm having no trouble talking with you . . . or with anyone since leaving Earth. Everyone's been perfectly wonderful to me."

I'll just bet they have, I thought.

"Then, there's my moral training, of course. Modesty, hope, affection, wit, temperance, all of that. Everything needed to protect and sustain me as a valuable possession of yours." She smiled demurely. "Any attribute you find lacking, or in too great a quantity, you call the Jones company for a repairman. They told me to tell you that."

I got up and took a few turns about the room to steady my nerves. "Just one thing, Eden."

"Yes?"

"How much do you cost, and when do I have to pay?"

"In the case of a celebrity, such as yourself, Mr. Reed, the Company sets no specified amounts or dates of payment. A representative will contact you in the future to discuss the matter. Is that satisfactory?"

"It's unbelievable. Aren't they afraid I'll simply run off with you? Disappear?"

Eden told me no. "Besides, I'm conditioned to have a certain small voice in the matter."

"Oh?"

She smiled. "You wanted an actress, didn't you? So they had to build spirit and opinion into me."

"Not too much, I hope. I mean, after all, I'm going to be your director . . . your father, if I may use the word." I considered. "No, I don't like 'father'. Your guardian. That's it." Winking at her roguishly I added, "A good little ward must obey her guardian."

She lowered ebon lashes over her

lovely almond-shaped jade eyes. "I'm in your hands, Mr. Reed. I'll be just what you make of me."

"THIS is Eden Jones," I said sometime later. "Eden, my leading lady, Gloria Edwards."

"Hello." Eden gazed candidly at the girl, held out her hand.

"Chawmed, I'm sure." Disregarding the hand, Gloria made a point by point inspection of the taller woman. (I simply have to refer to Eden as a 'woman'.) "So you're an android, huh. I don't believe it, Marty."

"My very reaction, Gloria. But I've had proof."

She eyed me nastily. "Yeah?"

"Eden, show her your switch."

"What is she? A.C. or D.C.?"

"Either one, Gloria," Eden said nicely. She lifted the bun of her golden hair, disclosing the tiny flesh-colored stud that turned her on and off. "It's for when I sleep or if repairs have to be made on me. Most models have their switch between the shoulder blades, but my designers thought Mr. Reed might want me to be wearing all kinds of costumes, so they put it where it wouldn't show."

"And your power socket, Eden," I prompted proudly.

She displayed a silvery ring on her middle finger. "Sure. You just flip back the top, like . . . this . . ." The face of the ornament swung back, disclosing the twin holes of a socket. "And plug in the power here. It jumps the plastex of my

skin and is picked up by a buried terminal ring. From there it goes to my batteries."

"Turn yourself off once." Gloria's expression was sickly-sweet. "I want to watch you fall on your face."

"I can't turn myself off, I'm conditioned against it. Only an authorized company serviceman can, or Mr. Reed. Besides," Eden explained seriously, "I don't fall. My gyros go on spinning plenty long for me to find a chair and sit."

Defeated and dangerous, Gloria stalked off in high miff. I felt rather sorry for the girl: To be out-acted, out-sung, and out-danced by an artificial creation . . . even one as convincing as Eden Jones. It was rather a pity. But there would always be a place in my organization for Gloria—costumes, serving, something. I am not one to reward years of faithful service with shabby treatment.

"It's time you were getting dressed, isn't it, Eden?"

She took my wrist—her touch as warm as a human's and twice as thrilling, for some reason—and looked at my watch. "I'll have to hurry."

A few minutes later, I saw her off in a cab for the Servant's, she and the two men who were to act with her in this crucially important play. As the zero minute approached, I busied myself about my control room, checking the screens, the stage chart, speakers, scripts . . . wondering for the hundredth time if Eden, with all her beauty and

talent could manage with as little training as I'd had time to give her.

At the Servant's place, she checked in, still superbly confident. "Speakers Ok, Marty." I watched in a vision screen as she concealed one behind each ear, then made a last minute study of the script.

It was a slender story indeed; barely a synopsis of a story, with much of the performance work to be ad lib on my inspiration. It had to do with a singer, Eden, who sees her lover off on a gallant suicide mission, minutes before greeting her returning husband, a furloughed Space Patrolman. In rehearsal it had gone rather well a couple of times, though never quite the same in both runs. But the three had the idea well in hand, and with plenty of nimble coaching from my end it should make a fine showpiece for my star, as well as hewing closely to the preferences established by the Servant.

The patron's screen lighted automatically and an image of Lon Fleming swirled into form. As he seated himself in the bedroom we had fitted out for Eden's, I alerted my three: "His Highness is ready, folks. He's taken the white foam chair, so keep your business left and right of the bed, and Eden—watch how you sit at your mirror. He must see your reflection during the scene you're crying and trying to put on make-up. Here we go. One, on stage."

Eden Jones, in a saucy white skirt and jacket, danced excitedly into the room from the patio door, hug-

ging a letter to her breast. Kicking off her sandals, she bounced onto the bed, and sitting crosslegged, read the note to herself.

I glanced at the patron's screen for his reaction: Lon Fleming had risen from the chair. His face white, mouth working silently, he held out one hand. Then, as if remembering he could be seen, he reached back and let himself down into the chair . . . his movements those of an old man or a sick one. Disbelievingly, he shook his head, then smiled sadly.

He was hooked!

"We've got him, Eden," I said into her cue mike. "Now the music."

She responded by leaning ecstatically back against the pillows, then rolling over and over on the huge bed till she could reach the music box. Clicking on a recording, she smiled at the melody as if reminiscently, then slid from the bed and swayed her extravagant body to the rhythm. She hummed, then fitting the words of the letter to the melody, began singing them aloud:

"My Dearest. Soon I'll be with you again . . .

Tonight . . . tonight at eight . . ."

And so forth.

It was a very effective bit, for as her shamelessly exciting contralto told the note's content, she let her body dance to the bittersweet melody.

I became aware of someone standing beside me—Gloria, with tears streaming down her face, caught up in the splendor of my protege's act-

ing, evidently, for she too swayed to the song.

"Changed your mind about her, eh?"

"That pile of aluminum?" she sobbed. "Revolting!"

Women! I returned to my directing, bring on the first man, her lover, coaching the two through their embrace, their dance, and feeding dialogue as it occurred to me. The Servant was attention itself; leaning alertly forward, his hands clutching at the knobs of the chair arms, he followed my drama as if the fate of the System hung on its outcome.

I decided to twist the knife a little. "Tell her," I coached into Peter's mike, "that the man sending you on this mission is an arrogant dolt who pretends to be a democratic leader."

Peter winced, but wove my suggestion into his next line.

". . . and also, darling," he said, "there'd be no use appealing the assignment. The General is an arrogant dolt who has no use for the individual. One man, ten, means utterly nothing to him. He'll become great to History because he's forgotten humility and humanity."

"More," I urged.

Peter released Eden's hand and walked to the music box. He clicked it off, and in the silence that fell said, "I pity him, sometimes. Has there ever been music for him, anywhere in his life?"

Gloria was tugging at my arm.

"Marty, stop it. Look at him." She was pointing at the patron's screen, and there I saw the shadowy image of the ruler of Tombola. Agony lined his face, and his eyes glistened with tears.

"Ok, kids. Into the talk about Eden's husband."

Gladly, Peter dropped the topic and took up the new line. And as if in appreciation of my *noblesse oblige*, Gloria patted my shoulder.

INSPIRED by my control over Lon, I cued my actors into scenes that brought joy to the man's face, then hope for the tragic pair, only to wipe this out and replace it with anxiety as Eden announced her husband was but minutes away.

"There's no time for tears, now," Peter told Eden, "and not too much left for kisses. So dance for me, once more before I go." He turned the music on. "Make it something I'll remember clear to Scorpius."

A smile trembled on Eden's lips. "And back," she whispered.

"And back, darling."

I'll confess my own eyes were moist as Eden, holding off her tears, began her dance of farewell. And when Peter zipped up his tunic and stepped out into the night without a word, Gloria sobbed anew.

An extremely damp production, I reflected, dabbing at my eyes with my sleeve. My directorial genius, however, must not be made to appear onesided, so I resolved the next production would show my adroit

flair for comedy.

"That was quite adequate, Eden. Now break the pace. You know he's gone, but take it dumbly. Change the music. Put away his note. Get to your makeup."

She did as I ordered, and to the banal thumping of an archaic blues tune, seated herself at the ornate vanity. But from a drawer she took out some sparkling object that resembled a pendant or brooch and began swinging it into and out of a stab of light from the bed lamp.

"Whatever that is, Eden, put it down and get on with your makeup scene."

She continued to swing the bauble back and forth into the light, until I found myself trying to follow its dancing path.

"Stop that, girl. You'll have us all asleep. Quit it!"

Eden rose to her feet and still twirling the glittering object, walked slowly over to stand before the Servant. The thing seemed to have a light source of its own, now, and my gaze grew tired attempting to keep track of the tiny cascade of glinting light from it. Back and forth, and back and forth . . .

With an effort I recovered my attention. "Damn it, Eden, you've done a fairly good job up to now. What's the matter with you? You trying to get us all repealed?"

Seeming to answer, the woman raised her great green eyes to the tele button that was feeding me the scene, then looked down at the

Servant.

And ten miles away, I saw, on the patron's screen, the image of Lon Fleming sitting rigid in his white chair, his glazed eyes pivoting to and fro as if glued to the twisting, swinging bauble.

"Way, way, down," crooned Eden. "Slowly, slowly. Soft, slow, down, down, down." I could barely hear her. "It's good, good, Lon. It's slow, slow, soft. That's . . . it. Down . . . far, far, down . . . soft . . . slow . . . sleep. Deep . . . sleep. Sleep."

Was I losing my mind?

"Eden," I roared. "Stop it. Stop and get back to your brush and your lipstick and your change of blouse." She paid not the slightest attention.

"Eden! Come home. You're fired. Through. Washed up with your big chance with J. Marty Reed."

She continued to croon to the nodding man.

"One more chance, you . . . you pile of aluminum. Stop it, or I'll give you to a dockhand. Eden! Suppose a guard were to look in?" I doubted this would happen, however, for the Servant had been instructed to insure privacy for the drama. I turned to Gloria. "Has she blown a fuse or something?" I wailed. "Maybe her cue phones are shot. Yes, that must be it! Gloria, I'm going to order one of the men to come in and take over. Push her out of the room, if necessary."

"I wouldn't, Marty," Gloria said

thoughtfully, her attention riveted to the strange scene on the screen before us. "If Lon is really hypnotized, only Eden can bring him out of it correctly. And somehow . . . somehow I think she knows what she's doing."

AT the Servant's villa, Eden looked thankfully into the view button and nodded; my mike had fed her our conversation from the hotel. "Stanford," she addressed Lon again. "Thirty years ago, but only a moment, really. Only yesterday. Stanford, and you met Anna. Remember what you two talked about? Freedom, Lon. The perfect democracy. You were going to make one out in the stars, somewhere."

The man in the white chair buried his face in his hands.

"And you tried, I know. Here on Tombola, Lon, you started to make those old dreams come true. But something happened. Remember the trials eight years ago? Go back to it, Lon. Remember your indecisions, your wondering if the average man was capable of guiding his own destiny? Go back to that moment when you gave the judge your suggestions . . ."

The Servant moaned and began speaking. His words were low and frantic, and the mikes spotted about the bedroom brought me only disconnected fragments. ". . . had to make . . . stand . . . impossible and wrong, but how to . . . Anna . . . died . . . They swore to fight

me . . . executions necessary."

For long minutes he rambled on while Eden stood before him, prompting occasionally, getting him back on the track, sending him over and over the moment. And when he at last sat back, eyes still closed, he sighed deeply. And to my astonishment he began chuckling. Eden resumed swinging the bright little piece of jewelry. "And Christmas day, three years back, men came to you with word that the other 'roids of this cluster were planning to seize Tombola. Those men, Lon. Remember them?"

The Servant, his eyes upon the swinging sparkle, nodded slowly. "Rummel, Kline, and Beard," he said.

"They lied to you, Lon. Their evidence was false, concocted by industrialists here on Tombola. Go back to that moment. Slide on back to it and look again at their faces. See how they watch each other? See how eager they are for you to sign the weapons bill. You suspected it later, didn't you, Lon, but there didn't seem anything you could do about it? But remember the Lon Fleming at Stanford? What did he dream about freedom and government?"

The Servant's stony eyes followed the swinging glitter, and I decided things had gone far enough. Miss Android number Seven Sixty-six could push me just so far. Whatever scheme she was weaving was about to come to a tacky end, for when

I touched the gong button, signalling the play was over, she'd find herself with a corps of attendants crowding in. Let her explain their leader's odd condition, while I—miles away and completely disguised—would be stowing away on a freighter.

The bauble's sparkle seemed to leap from the vision screen before me, a trick of my tired eyes. I looked away, located the gong button, but my arm . . . It seemed asleep . . . heavy. Both arms . . . like collapsed lead, numb, not mine at all. Alarmed, I leaned back in my chair and gazed at the scene in the villa bedroom.

The sparkle . . . back and forth and back . . .

“HMMM?” My voice!

“It's all right, Mr. Reed. Wake up.” Eden.

“Certainly. What?” Me again. “Get on with the play, Eden. Going to send in your husband, now.” Although extremely sleepy, I rallied in the best traditions of the Theatre. “Number two man enter.”

“Marty, open your eyes.” Gloria's voice, exasperated.

Eyes? “Naturally. Of course. Hello.”

Eden and Gloria stood before me.

Eden! I sprang from the chair. “But the play, girl, the play. What are you doing back here?”

“The play's been over for about an hour.” Eden sat against the desk

and studied me curiously. Angrily, I tore my gaze from her 39, 24, 36, and looked at Gloria.

“Eden's right, Marty. It was a great success. After you blanked out she went on talking to the Servant for thirty minutes or so, then they finished the play.”

“The Servant liked it, Marty.” Eden Jones fluffed a billow of flaxen hair over her shoulder. “He said you were a genius.”

“Well!” So the rogue had some aesthetic sense after all. “But what about all that nonsense with the sparkler? All that dangerous talk?”

Eden shook her head. “He came out of it as I was at the mirror, tying my blouse. Didn't remember a thing.”

Gloria brought me a brandy. “She's got an interesting story for you, Marty. Better sit down and hear it. Me, I'm going to bed. 'Night, folks.”

“Goodnight, Gloria. Thanks for understanding.”

“Nothing. 'Night, Marty. Poor Marty.” She left the room.

“What does she mean ‘poor Marty’?” I demanded.

Eden laughed. “I can't possibly imagine.” Leaving the desk, she crossed over to my table and came back with the catalogue from Jones Robotics. Taking a card from between its pages she handed it to me. “Ever seen one of these?”

It was a plain white rectangle of stiff paper, rather thick. Eden leaned down and touched it. “Watch.”

Letters came to life on the bare surface. "The bearer," I read, astonished, "is a special agent of the Dominion of Earth. She has Dominion police powers and is to be shown every courtesy." A signature was scrawled at the lower right corner, and beneath it in smaller words—Chief, Deepspace Investigation.

I swallow several times before speaking. "Agent?"

Eden took back her card. "Yes, Mr. Reed. Let me tell you about it."

It took quite a while, but most of the answers made good sense. Earth, through its organizations within The Dominion, was playing a stronger and more subtle game in the System than most people realized. From the old Dominion halls in San Francisco, agents fanned out to the planets and the clusters to tip the balances in Civilization's favor. A gentle nudge here . . . a missing politician there . . . a disguised agent substituted for someone somewhere else . . . was succeeding in keeping the pattern of growth and culture within less bloody lines than heretofore.

The 'roid of Tombola had been seen as the key to the political and economic destiny of not only the Plymouth cluster, but to 'roids everywhere. Because of its size and the volume of its commerce, a correctly governed Tombola was indicated. And when reports of Tombola's civil stench and militant aspect had filtered in from the rest of the Plymouth cluster to the Dominion headquarters, the case became hot.

"You see," said Eden, seating herself on the carpet at my feet, "it had to become really severe before we could 'act.'"

"Obviously," I said, "but tell me why. In your own words, my dear."

Frowning at me for no apparent reason, Eden said that attending to thousands of 'roids in thousands of clusters was such a titanic task that only those spots about to flame up could be given agent attention. "The affair Tombola, for example, has been allowed to fester for almost eight years. Some day, The Dominion knew, it would require surgery, but until last week it went untouched."

Information, however, had been received showing that a putsch was about to be launched from Tombola. A "policing" expedition to arrest "dangerous" elements throughout the cluster.

A war of conquest, in other words.

"But why, Eden, instead of all this skulking about wasn't the Servant 'removed', as you put it? Why not snatch him away?"

The woman toyed with her brandy. "Lon Fleming is the logical leader of this 'roid and cluster. Until a few years ago, that is. He's made its products valuable throughout the System. He's arbitrated strikes successfully, pushed through educational measures. His administration served as a model to other 'roids. But he was fooled by men within his cabinet. A clique bred there quietly, gaining in strength and power, who

managed to undo most of Lon's good works, and to convince him that a strongman government was necessary."

She put down her glass, twirled it reflectively. "We decided on a long chance, Marty. If the old visions and idealisms and strengths once possessed by the Servant could be cleared and reactivated, the Servant himself could set things straight again. The techniques of such a therapy were taught me and I was given the job."

"But why trust such a mission to a mere android, Eden? I recognize that you are goodlooking and possessed of a certain amount of acting ability, but to set an android against creatures of flesh and blood . . . Well!"

Eden Jones narrowed her slanted jade eyes. "Not very wise of us, eh Marty?"

"Hardly, my dear. Why stick together an attractive model of the Servant's memory of an old and influential college sweetheart when a real live human could probably be found and disguised for the job."

"One could?"

"Of course, my child." I explained in detail how eyes could be given a Eurasian slant, how the pupils might conceivably be tinted with some of the new pigment dyes, how hair is easily colored.

"And *this*?" Eden waved one hand slowly down the length of her gorgeous body. "Sponge rubber?"

"Naturally not. Simply a matter of finding a woman of the correct

proportions before beginning the rest of the job."

She was silent for a time, eyeing me. "Marty, you amaze me. You are truly a *unique*."

"It's nothing," I replied modestly. "When one's knocked about as much as I have, dabbling in the sciences as well as starring in the arts, one obtains a certain ability . . . a certain facile mentality that can cut through to the quick of a riddle."

I went on to admit I recognized the Dominion's necessity for fast action in this case, and that using Jones Robotics as a cover was as neat a method as any of rigging in the agent on me—and on the Servant. "But a human should have been employed. The Dominion should have foreseen the use to which a double of Lon Fleming's old girl friend, Anna, could be put. Then when your Tombola informant saw I was about to get through to Lon, so to speak, they could have sent that woman to me for instruction in acting. We could have done the job up right. None of this hit and miss and waiting until the last moment."

"But Marty," Eden said in a little girl voice, "that would have meant making you a sort of agent—gambling on the unknown factor you represented. It might have been dangerous for you, I mean."

"Tut." I waved a hand languidly to demonstrate my indifference. "I have half a mind to join them anyway. It would add spice to my tours."

"There'll be spice, Reed, if my therapy didn't go deep enough. Who do you think the Servant will be after if tomorrow he wakes up with full memory of this evening?"

"Uh . . . But you can explain things to him. Or maybe you could put him under again. Anyway, the Dominion wouldn't let anything happen. Would it? Huh?"

Eden smiled, and if I didn't know her to be the innocent construction she was, I would have sworn she smiled with malice.

"I could get away quickly enough. But as far as protecting you" She shook her golden head sorrowfully. "I'm only a feeble android, after all. Not a strong and clever human like yourself."

I managed to slop some brandy into my empty glass.

"However," she mused, "if you were an agent Yes. That might do it! You'd have certain powers and resources that would help. And you'd be able to pay your bills here and maybe get away."

"Eden, sweet child," I exclaimed, taking her hand in my own. "It isn't that I'm afraid of the Servant. I could outwit him, I'm sure you know that. But the Dominion could use a man of my talents. Make me an agent. Swear me in. Please, Eden?"

"I'll do it. Stand up, James Marty Reed!"

I stood before the woman.

"Do you solemnly swear to be

trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent?"

"All that? Yes."

"Raise the two first fingers of your right hand and say 'I do'."

"I do."

"They're shaking, Marty."

"I'm emotional about becoming an agent. Can I take my hand down now?"

"Sure. Well, that's that."

"But, Eden, don't I get anything else? A card? A password, code-books, or something?"

Eden cocked her head, considered. "Not your regular card. That has to be made on Earth and keyed to your aura. But I'll give you the password. Whenever you think you are being contacted by another agent, you just whisper to him" She glanced around the room carefully. "You whisper 'Have you done your good deed?' And if he is an agent, he'll answer you 'What the hell are you talking about?' Very annoyed, just as if he thought you were simple."

I could instantly see the ingenuity of this arrangement.

Eden Jones yawned, just like a real human. I pointed this out to her.

"You specified lifelike, Marty. But I couldn't fool you, of course. No matter how well they make us we aren't quite the real thing, huh Marty."

"You'd fool anyone else, my dear. But I like you just as much as if

you were human. Now run along to bed. Shall I come in and turn you off?"

She said that would be fine, so after waiting a discreet interval, I followed into her bedroom and clicked the tiny switch at the base of her skull. Instantly her eyes shut, her breathing became deep and regular.

And, Heral, I confess to you something I could tell to no one else: I leaned down and kissed that unconscious android full on its lovely warm lips. It was so lifelike!

TWO letters awaited me on my breakfast table the next morning. One bore the official seal of the Servant, and I had to nerve myself to open it. But inside was a thick sheaf of hundred stellar notes! Ten times what we had contracted to earn. And a message which said: "Your performance was more of a success on Tombola than you can ever know, Mr. Reed. Forgive my previous shortness, and know that you are ever welcome to this 'roid. I regret I shall be unable, however, to find time for the remainder of your series. A long-delayed house-cleaning of my administration, and certain reforms which I am already undertaking will keep me much too busy. And in some manner I do not understand, I feel that from your playlet I gained the energy and inspiration to set forth on these tasks. Goodby, and best wishes from your obedient Servant."

My sigh of relief blew stellar notes from the table.

And beneath that letter one from Eden Jones: "Dear guardian and fellow agent, Marty: During the night I was called back to Earth. Another mission. Accept the enclosed thousand stellars as a gesture of appreciation from the Dominion. And keep the token from me as a memento of one who thinks you a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Eden, number Seven Sixty-six."

Memento?

I shook the envelope and out fell a tiny switch, cleverly bonded to a skin-colored patch of tape. A duplicate of the one on the back of Eden's neck.

But why, Heral? Why *that* for a memento?

Our ship is just emerging from the Plymouth cluster, and Tombola is far behind. The engagement was a financial success, for after making good my landing bond, hotel bills, and paying that accursed department store, I still have three thousand stellars left.

Everything is well with me, or would be if I could just fathom the quirk in that android that made her leave me a duplicate of her switch.

Gloria says she knows, but won't tell me until sometime when she's good and mad. What can she mean?

Women!

Regards,

J. Marty Reed.

THE EDITORIAL

(Continued from page 5)

bated, probed, discussed. He used his *maturity*, and whatever conclusion he arrived at, positive or negative, it was an *adult* conclusion. Only in a very few instances was immaturity applied with its attendant senseless attacks.

Where else in the world of literature, propaganda and what have you could these two things have been subjected to the processes of reasoning? Where in all the world would the imaginative abilities of a high grade of maturity have been available?

Our humble thanks to Mr. Overstreet for showing us the true wonder of the science fiction reader! And now, let there be no further debate as to the *adulthood* and *maturity* and *quality* of both science fiction in *all* of its varied forms, and of its readers, with *all* of their varied preferences!

Which is where the average editor would sign his initials and let well enough alone, but we have a few things whirling in our upper story that we'll have to boil down into words. Speaking of words, we remember the reader who once accused us of "wandering in a semantic labyrinth". He almost chortled the accusation at us; and departed enthusiastic with the devastating manner in which he had laid us low. That type of phrase is typical of unreason. Let us assume that

semantics is the method of communication between reasoning beings. We say "assume" even though it is, because we wish to be charitable to our critic, whose identity we have forgotten. If words can be a labyrinth, leading nowhere, then they are meaningless. And how could we communicate with meaninglessnesses? Why, the proper definition of all writings would then be "just another Palmer editorial"! And how senseless that would be!

But in a less senseless vein, we are worried about Mr. Overstreet's "fools who pull levers, push buttons, turn dials and shift gears". Just who are these fools? When we look around us we are shocked by the immaturity we see in almost everyone. Especially in high places. Men are in powerful positions through various accidents; of birth, of election, of posterior-kissing and so on. The "big boss" in a large firm browbeats his employees; the politician shouts down his opponent, lobbies for something which may have far-reaching bad influences in the future merely because he wants to be reelected by his sponsors; an army man prepares for a war he himself will have to start if his preparations are not to be exposed for what they are. On every hand we see "arrested development toward maturity", especially in the case of "imagination", "empathy" and the "linkage"

type of reasoning which forecasts the future. Our politicians have an immature roadblock toward peace which is a fear of persecution, of the upset of their present prestige, of the artificial "importance" they have assumed which makes them feel "wanted". The result of their immature reasoning is toward the conclusion that there will be war. They say they seek peace, but *unconsciously* they prepare continually for war. They are "arrested individuals", still in their psychological childhood. They are masquerading behind a chronological adulthood. They are big in body, but small in character. We are being dominated by *children*!

Perhaps it is time for a science fiction writer to write a story picturing a future in which all people in responsible positions are placed there only after their psychological maturity has been positively determined. A story in which our democratic system of government is depicted as a *method* and carried on by *methodical* minds; not by arrested persons whose childish minds are *incapable* of discerning the *whole truth* of democracy; but merely the personal advantages which they themselves can gain! Democracy is the government of reason, and it is for *all* people.

What is the empathetic maturity of a man who can drop a bomb on a baby? Are these the men who are seeking your *reasoning* vote for the next term of the presidency of the

United States? Can we find a man who is *emphathetically* mature?

Perhaps the only answer is more science fiction fans! And with that in mind, it would seem reasonable for us all to bend every effort to further the cause of science fiction, wherein lies the power to see logical implications: of similarity and difference, of cause and effect, of relationships in time and space, of quantity and quality, of the subjective and the objective, of importance and unimportance, of maturity and immaturity, of humanity and inhumanity, and above all of love and hate!

If our science fiction has all of these qualities and abilities, it will be *adult* and *mature* and a credit to all of us. *Rap.*

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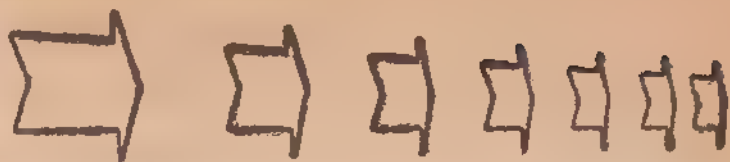
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SPECIAL FEATURES



THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay \$1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in the world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.

LETTERS



H. L. GOLD

Knowing how meticulous you are with facts, I'm sure you'll want to correct the errors on pages 156 and 158 of the Letters Department in your January issue.

Only one story, TRANSFER POINT by Anthony Boucher, was selected for anthologization before I saw it. There was no arrangement to have the story appear in GALAXY. Actually, I asked for a complete rewrite and Tony knew that I would have rejected it if I still had not been satisfied. Whether I bought the story or not, it was scheduled for book publication, which, by the way, turned out to be the second version instead of the first. I don't know how many stories I've returned in spite of their having been chosen for anthologies; it must be close to two dozen. Noth-

ing whatever is printed in GALAXY by arrangement, except advertising and special features. With the one exception noted above, every story reprinted from GALAXY was asked for *after* publication in the magazine. No anthologist has been given the privilege of seeing manuscripts, galleys, page proofs or advance copies, although many have requested it, nor have I been influenced by the information that stories were selected for anthologization before being submitted to me. It wouldn't make any difference to me what a story was slated for—movies, TV, radio, or anything else. I'd still turn it down if I thought it wasn't good.

The other point concerns the GALAXY Novels. When we started our publishing program, it was with the monthly magazine and a bi-monthly reprint pocketbook, which,

however, was flexible enough to take originals. The monthly has used serials consistently from the beginning, with a complete issue between the end of one serial and the start of another to please those who were less enthusiastic about continued stories. This arrangement seems to be satisfactory to everybody; at any rate, the compromise abruptly stopped all complaints. The GALAXY Novels are doing fine. We are not contemplating suspending publication of these bi-monthly books, as you seem to imply. Why should we when they're selling well?

All good wishes for a splendid 1952 for yourself, your staff, and for your extremely lively magazines. May you get the 320 pages you were wistfully recalling . . . and sell 99 per cent. of the print order!

GALAXY SCIENCE

FICTION,

505 East 14th St.,
New York 9, N.Y.

Actually, we didn't mention Galaxy in referring to stories selected for anthologies before they were published. I assume you inferred it from the context of the reader's letter we were answering. But to be more meticulous, and factual, we have been informed, gleefully, in at least two instances, that stories we purchased from writers had already been selected for anthologies! This information came out at social gabfests at which both your editor and an anthology publisher were

present. The purpose of the publisher was to compliment us on our acumen in buying the story. Actually we knew nothing about the previous arrangement. These two instances concern OTHER WORLDS. We know for a fact there are other instances. More in fields outside science fiction, also. Frankly, we are disillusioned. As for your personal involvement in such arrangements, let's be very meticulous indeed and state certainly that we never suspected you of them, nor believe that you would. Believe us, any sally between us is purely unpersonal, and our readers are quite aware that we admire both you and your magazine. Our idea of a story worthy of being placed in an anthology is a story that has passed the test of public scrutiny, and has been widely acclaimed. The personal selections of one man, or a small group of persons, annoys this editor, because he knows from long experience that no single opinion as to the worth of a story is worth a tinker's dam. For an example, would any of these anthologists "select" a Shaver Mystery story? You bet your sweet life not—because they are deliberately ignoring the largest facet of sf readers ever to acclaim a story as great! If I were an anthologist, I could not possibly insult (by ignoring) such a large group of readers, and I would be compelled to thrust aside my own personal opinion, whatever it was, and include one or more of

those stories in order to insure the BEST in my collection! And from some of the distinctly lousy anthologies I've read, I rather think my way would be best! As for your second correction, I'm delighted to learn that I am wrong in that the Galaxy Novels are not selling. It seems I pulled a boner on my analysis of that particular market. Maybe I shouldn't have stood in bed in that field, eh?—Rap.

BILL E. MUNDELL

What has Rog Phillips got up his sleeve now—pertaining to "These Are My Children" of course! After careful deliberation, I've come to the conclusion that you've mixed up two completely different stories in Part 1 of that (ugh!) serial. Anyway you've completely aroused my ire or my curiosity, because the enclosed subscription indicates I want to get cleared-up in my own mind just what is going on.

Incidentally this is my first subscription to an s-f magazine of any sort which belies my interest in such for many many years. You may find this hard to believe, but I read or should say "saw" my first s-f magazine only four months ago. I've loved this sort of thing ever since I first began to realize what there was to like and what to reject. You can imagine the emptiness I felt not realizing there were magazines and books of fantasy available! And now imagine my delight! Since September I have grabbed every copy of OW, Galaxy, As-

tounding, F&SF and Imagination I could find.

I must admit, however, that the first magazine I found was *Galaxy* and therefore, it ranks first in my heart if for no other reason than that it first helped me to satisfy my longing.

Rog Phillips' story causes my first letter and subscription to come your way, however. I definitely intend to subscribe to a few more. OTHER WORLDS is definitely here to stay as far as I am concerned, though! Keep up the good work.

Thanks loads for "The Real Flying Saucer". I've always had my own ideas of the saucers and I didn't fall for that LOOK article at all!

As for your January issue, I'm stumped. Let's put "Act Of God" on top and follow with "Saucers" and "Happy Solution". As for "These Are My Children"—I'm still confused!

2128 B Street
Lincoln, Nebr.

We think you'll have your confusion cleared up by now, having read the second part of Rog Phillips' new serial. He certainly took on a tremendous plot, didn't he? Now we're wondering what will happen to all those "super-kids" when they grow up? We're also wondering if Rog might know, and do another super novel telling us! As for that subscription, you did a wise thing! What we've got coming up in the next year is begin-

ning to excite even us. Byrne's new serial, a big new novel by Richard S. Shaver with all the excellence of his best novels, although completely fiction, a really terrific yarn by Gibson, another Frank Farar of Venus story by Irwin, Mack Reynolds, Eric Frank Russell (oh how that man can write!) Walter M. Miller, Jr., William C. Bailey, L. Sprague de Camp. . . But why go on? Well, one more thing: the "diary" and "notes" of a science fiction editor! Which editor? We wonder if you can guess!—Rap.

OTTIS BARRON

I enjoyed the stories in OTHER WORLDS—the ones I could read. What's the matter with your printing? Some of the printing was under the binding, the other was off the page.

I don't care for continued stories. You read the story and are just getting interested when what happens but you come to "continued" and you have to wait until the next issue. Ray, I love *Imagination*! I only wish it were published more often. So, to heck with OTHER WORLDS and "Ray" for *IMAGINATION*."

Napanock, N.Y.

Now how did that letter get in here! Somebody'll pay for this! Criticism, criticism, nothing but . . . say, what's that you say about the printing? Look, we can't have that? So, we've taken some steps, and if any of you readers find badly printed copies, especially with printing

under the binding and off the page, so you can't read your copy, you tell us about it, and bingo, you get another copy! But we promise, every mechanical fault that may occur will be ironed out until OW is a perfect magazine. As for Imagination, maybe it's your imagination that makes you think it's good? Or maybe it's Bill Hamling's Imagination? Personally we think it's terrific! Wonder why he doesn't come out oftener than every two months? What's the matter, Bill, no imagination?—Rap.

NORMAN SCHWARZ

I would appreciate any information you or your readers might have on three dimensional chess. That is, if the game exists outside of science fiction. Thank you.

Student Co No. 20

Camp Gordon, Ga.

Seems to us we've heard of it, outside sf, but we can't help you out. Maybe our readers can. Sorta seems you'd need three hands to play it!—Rap.

JIM SCHREIBER

I could rave on and on about the merits of your publication, but instead I'll just say: Excellent! I like all the sf mags, but yours rates way up there!

Could you insert a little something in the PERSONALS section about our group? It's called the Extra-Terrestrial Research Organization, and studies unusual phenomena. Right now we're doing work on your specialty, the flying

disks. We plan on putting out a fanzine, called ETRON, early in '52. Any interested persons should contact me at

4118 W. 143 Street,
Cleveland 11, Ohio.

Okay, Jim. Tell you one guy who's interested: Albert Ehrke, 441 N. Painter, Whittier, Calif. And we put your plea in Letters instead of personals, because we think this is a good thing. Any of our readers interested in such studies want to join Jim and Ronnie Poland, 14 Jackson Street, Monroeville, Ohio, and their group?—Rap.

FRITZ HERVEY

I have just read your article on Rib Mountain and am amazed at your omission, as a loyal "Wisconsinite", of any mention of the State Radio Station up there. Don't tell me you didn't see it—a 300 foot hunk of tower with red lights all over it! Its call letters are WHRM and it operates on 91.9 mc FM, one of a statewide chain.

WHKW,

Rt. 1

Chilton, Wisconsin.

We sure did see that tower! Our wife swears it was falling on her! And we listen exclusively to the State FM Network, especially to your WHKW. Plenty of good classical music, and some really adult programs. Makes the big radio chains sound sort of silly. I notice, too, that you are now taking cats into the Bandwagon Correspondence School orchestra! Both our

cats are tuning up and learning how to write so they can make application to join!—Rap.

H. GOMBERG

I have just managed to get hold of two copies of OW, May 1950 and September 1951, and was very impressed with this new sf product, so I followed your advice to reader Bardbury for getting a sub to OW. Getting the necessary form from the post office was quite easy and soon I received the money order which I've sent off. The only snag is that you don't quote any overseas subscription rates, so I've just sent the equivalent of \$6.00 and I hope I'll get 24 issues including the back issues.

Your editorial policy and frankness is a refreshing change and you have certainly managed to keep your stories reasonably adult and have not allowed bad taste to creep in, and they're still plenty of fun. In addition to the stories, I enjoy your features, personals, letters, etc, but especially I appreciate your editorial, which sets the tone for the whole mag.

Words,
Alesandra Rd.,
Lowestoft, Suffolk,
England.

We haven't published any special foreign rates because we accept such subscriptions without penalty. It's part of our policy of accepting science fiction fans as equal all over the world. So, you'll get your 24 issues, including back issues! And so

will any other resident of a foreign country. In fact, we invite your fellow Englishmen to subscribe. We'll gladly pay that extra postage necessary to send copies overseas.
—*Rap.*

HAL M. DRAKE

I am disturbed by a trend in science fiction which you, and therefore OW, are most positively fostering. Now this is not an attempt to change you personally, nor to change your editorial policy, except in this one way. During the past several years, science fiction, in growing and becoming more imaginative, has broadened to a point where further expansion of scientific ideas has become difficult without directly contradicting some of the basic concepts of Christianity. The result, therefore, has been that Christianity has been discarded.

On your editorial pages, especially, you have indicated that you personally do not believe in the Bible. Your contact with science has made you realize that there *is* a God, but the one which you think exists is one which you have created utilizing logic and present scientific knowledge. You have, therefore, provided yourself with a scientific explanation for God.

Assuming that there exists a Being which created this universe, it is likely that our knowledge is inferior to that of His. And assuming that the Bible was written at His direction, it is understandable that our understanding of this Book is

less complete than His. I feel that as man's knowledge of science increases, it will approach, as a limit, the scientific knowledge of God. Similarly, our understanding of the Bible will become more and more complete, and will approach God's understanding of it as a limit. But, as in mathematics, these limits will never be reached. A created intelligence can hardly be expected to surpass the creator. And anyone as imaginative and as much a philosopher as you necessarily are must have reached the conclusion long ago that a creator exists; that we just didn't happen.

As our knowledge of science has increased, so has our knowledge of the Bible increased. What appeared to be contradictions of science and the Bible—a thousand years ago have now ceased to be contradictions, in light of scientific developments. I see no reason why this cannot be expected to continue. The new contradictions which have arisen, I believe, will be abolished in perhaps another thousand years, and new contradictions will arise.

Science fiction is an extrapolation of presently known science. Such extrapolations are quite interesting and often exciting. But just as extrapolations of the science of Aristotle would be ludicrous today, so will our science fiction of today be ludicrous in 2952. We are not prophets. But neither should our fiction destroy the major stabilizing influence remaining in our society. Religion

throughout the world is being abandoned, as predicted by the Bible. Its abandonment is being accompanied by an increase in immorality, and a lowering of the moral standards acceptable to society. History has graphically shown this to be true, and it is even apparent within our lifetimes.

I therefore suggest that you, regardless of your personal opinion, do not hasten the abandonment of religion. Your job, and the job of every journalist, writer and editor is more than just selling magazines; more than satisfying your personal sense of inferiority and insecurity.

Good science fiction stories have been written in which, at least, God and the Bible have been neutral. But good stories *could* be written (and I have never seen one) in which religion as we know it could be extrapolated paralleling the extrapolation of science. If any of your writers are sufficiently familiar with the subject, I strongly suggest that such a story be written; not to the detriment of religion, but to its advancement. Such a story would be acceptable to everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike.

But there are millions of people, who, like me, possess the quality of Christian faith, which, like a color, cannot be described. Some of us are your readers. Many of us resent such anti-religious stories and statements as have been written in the past, which depict God as some sort of superman and contradict our

present Christian beliefs sharply.

Much of this letter will be in disagreement with your ideas. I imagine, in fact, that it now lies in your wastebasket. But the preceding paragraph, I believe, is my one reason which may most strongly affect your policy.

Because of this letter's length, as well as its controversial topic and its personal observations, I do not expect you to consider it for publication. And because of the limitations previously stated, I do not believe the Bible or religion to be proper subjects for debate. I don't try to explain the Bible. I only believe in it. However, if you desire further correspondence on the subject, you will find me a most willing participant. I am particularly interested in your views.

I might state, in closing, that I am not a professional student of religion. I am a chemical engineer, an ex-college instructor, a lukewarm science fiction fan, and an amateur science fiction author (all stories to date have been indignantly rejected).

5622 Buffalo Ave.,
Niagara Falls, N.Y.

It has always seemed to me to be rather a cowardly, and uncomplimentary thing for an editor carefully to avoid publishing any letter pertaining to God, the Bible, religion, or his readers' remarks concerning his relationship or lack of relationship to religion or faith in his daily work — being an

editor. It has been a matter of letting a "hot" subject lie fallow. To me, it isn't a hot subject, to be avoided, it is a part of our daily lives which has tremendous influence on us all. It is perhaps the ONE subject which had best be understood and placed in a mature category in human thinking.

In OTHER WORLDS, we have used God as a character. We have "extrapolated" religion, just as we have science. "Act Of God" by Richard Ashby is such an extrapolation. "These Are My Children" is such an extrapolation. We've published other stories of a similar nature, although not all extrapolations, but merely imaginative concepts. They have been well received. They have not raised a furore. I think the very fact that they have not caused a rumpus is a very good sign. Human beings are becoming more mature. They can regard such a subject in a light other than that of unbridled prejudice, in the light of reason, in calmness, in tolerance, in understanding.

The great difficulty in the past has been the definition of the meaning of the word "religion". Just what does it mean? Is Christianity "religion"? Is Buddhism "non-religion"? Is the concept of a God which is purely personal and novel in nature "non religion"? Or are all these things "sectarianism"? Let us picture a baby abandoned on an asteroid complete with everything it will need to live out its

life in complete loneliness. But with no Bible, no explanation whatever of the term "religion", in fact, no term "religion" at all. Should that child, after due process of the only reasoning possible to it, arrive at the conclusion that its asteroid and its mysterious instruments of sustenance of life was "created", and no creator found on the asteroid, and the only other visible things, stars, would its belief that one or all of those stars "created" it, be religion?

Then, if a Bible suddenly fell out of space and landed at its feet, and imparted the information that the creator was God, his son was Christ, and 2000 years ago Christ died so that it might live, and it decided to believe this book, would that be religion? Would it be a Christian? Would its original star-god stamp it as a pagan?

It is not a question of belief at all. Belief at best is a rationalization, an opinion. At worst it is blind acceptance. One is based on making available evidence, no matter how complete or incomplete; or how understood, fit a desired pattern. The last is completely ignoring all evidence, for or against.

Christ himself said of the wise men of his day, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." He realized that they were incapable of grasping the reality of the whole as he saw it, because of their immaturity. He did not condemn them, but forgave them. Nor did he "forgive" a wrong doing, only accepted

a psychological limitation. He admitted that although their belief was not as his, they were not wrong! He gave them what information he could, and left them free to mull it over. He said: "I give you a new commandment, and it shall be sufficient unto you: love thy fellow man as thyself." That, I think, is religion. And let us, Christian or otherwise, not be afraid to extrapolate concerning creation, God, the Bible, the future of man's relationship to the universe in which both he and his God live; but rather shun the slavery that a psychological roadblock may engulf us in, with its attendant fear and prejudice, so that we cannot but remain in a position of empathetic immaturity; regardless of the fact that whatever our concepts are, they are always the best that our psychological development will permit.

The only road to maturity is through experience and through the exchange of ideas. And if God is not mature, then what is he?—Rap.

CARLA dePAULA LOPES

I am deeply interested in dianetics (I can almost see you tearing this up without reading further) and I feel that there is, along with the fiction and sensationalism of Mr. Hubbard, a lot of basic truth. Now, OTHER WORLDS is your magazine, and it is only right that you should say what you think about anything you please. What perhaps you don't realize is that you are alienating a fairly large seg-

ment of your readers by your constant disparagement of dianetics. Don't you think that you could better refute (if such is your aim) the arguments of Mr. Hubbard by a few documented case histories or the like showing that dianetic therapy, properly applied according to Hoyle, or rather Hubbard, did NOT work, than by resorting to cheap propaganda tricks? Frankly I would be interested to know why as intelligent a man as you seems to be willing to swallow the Shaver myth and somebody's idea of the final answer to the Flying Saucer as TRUTH and yet absolutely refuse to be open-minded about as rational a thing as dianetics? (I assume that you do believe what you write—if not, if it is just for the almighty dollar, then I am sorry I wasted my time and yours.)

It is probably a vain hope that you will answer this letter, but I would like to point out to you one thing—you are not writing rationally if you are writing sincerely. (A glance through Beardsley's "Straight Thinking" will show you what I mean.)

167 South Main St.,
Fairport, N.Y.

We have never said dianetics does not work. But it is dangerous to place such advanced psychiatry in the hands of immature persons, especially as a self-cure. Our LARGE objection to it is that it is not original, and the real credit is due to Freud. Freud's method of cure

was to get the patient, through a prolonged and seemingly irrelevant process of talking out his life, to revive the memory of repressed and long-forgotten shock experiences. When the revival finally did take place, when the unnegotiable experience was at last placed within the context of adult understanding—the conflict was resolved and the patient cured. What Hubbard did was to take a respected science and make a ludicrous fiction of it. He gave dynamite into the hands of children. As for case histories, read your newspapers. What about the murder and suicide, by the dianetics patient of her auditor and herself, because his relentless questioning had made him her psychic master, possessor of all her secret weaknesses, which he wasn't "clear" enough to abstain from taking advantage of? Sure dianetics works. Freud proved it long ago. But I would as soon trust my neuroses to the average dianetics auditor as sur-

gery to an ape. And I don't say that I don't know quite a few science fiction fans who have been intelligent enough to use dianetics safely and effectively. Unfortunately, all of us aren't intelligent enough for that.

As for the Shaver myth, as you call it, by what process of "straight thinking" do you DISMISS it? How do you KNOW it isn't at least partially true? On what factual basis do you discard it as false? You could relieve a lot of minds if you could positively explain it away! And as for Flying Saucers, it has been my impression that no final answer has been made known. Isn't your BELIEF that Shaverism is a myth and Flying Saucers do not exist exactly that? Does Beardsley say "to be safe, scoff"? And I'm sure the most sincere of insane persons can write quite irrationally. Sincerity is no sign of rationality.
—Rap.

THE MAN FROM TOMORROW

CAN you provide for your family? Can you feed them, clothe them, provide shelter—with your own knowledge and effort! If you cannot, it would be wise to learn. Within fifteen years America and the world will be faced with the advisability of giving up its so-called "standard of living" and face the reality that you can't get "something for nothing"; and the process of "buying" what you

want with money will no longer be a sufficient means to that end. Sweat and tears will gain better results, especially the sweat. The tears will be those of millions of "failures" in the elemental business of going on living.

History does not say exactly what caused the breakdown in the way of life based on an economy of scarcity, except that complexity was an important factor.—complexity

and perplexity. In short, the world, out of breath at the pace of its rapidly expanding mechanical civilization, stopped for breathing time and found stopping meant collapse.

The major driving force behind the stoppage was fear—and strain. The incredibly complex integrated mechanization of mankind created in him a mental and moral strain that broke him as on a rack, and sent him fleeing into what was to him a wilderness—but a wilderness of peace.

The ability of the dollar to facilitate the vast “operation” of civilization became so inadequate that not even the simplest necessities could be profitably distributed. The ordinary man faced the futility of “working for a living,” realized his labor was not enough, and accordingly he renounced his allegiance to the “system,” grasped for the crumbs, and tried to forget the cake.

And yet, a great new resurgence began to sweep the land, and those who found their hands acquiring new capabilities, faced the future with new courage, new eagerness. Everywhere new communities, small communities, sprang up. New ways of doing things simplified all of life,

and the pursuit of “pleasure” turned from meaningless things to constructive things. Accomplishment of a concrete nature became the pleasures of leisure time which was formerly only a time of boredom.

Government was simplified. Bureaucracy, topheavy, toppled into the dust. War, impossible to finance, became a disappearing phantom. But its last savage gestures did succeed in smashing the monstrous side of the machine age. And with it millions died.

And man’s protest at the pace at which he had been forced to proceed, with constant acceleration, was punctuated by Nature’s most violent demonstration of her power in three thousand years. The earth shook and trembled, the wind raged and roared, the sea struck at everything with clenched fists. Cold and heat struck at the very rocks.

All this took many years, but by the year 1985, mankind had become wiser—and humbler, and beginning a bright new future full of happiness and peace. In the coming of Halley’s comet, Man thought he saw a bright augur for the future—and he was right.

THE END

PERSONALS

I am preparing an INDEX TO THE SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINES which will cover 45 mags complete

from the first AS in 1926 thru 1950—the first 25 years of stf. Will list approximately 30,000 stories & arti-

cles, and be *THE* authority for collectors, researchers, anthologists, etc. To complete it, I would like authors to send me a list of their pseudonyms. In the case of "house names", would like the names of individual stories published. Donald B. Day, 3435 NE 38th Ave., Portland 13, Oregon . . . Will buy pre '49 aSF and back issues of Marvel. Also want *THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES* and *THE ILLUSTRATED MAN*; must be in good condition, with covers. Write stating price and condition. Al Colas, 22 Carnegie Drive, Hamilton College, Clinton, N.Y. . . . Can anyone help me locate *DAWN TO DUST*. I read the story years ago in a stf mag and would appreciate any information on where to find it. Aaron Robert Gristy, 1575 W. Vernor Hwy, Detroit 16, Mich. . . . Will sell or trade books on Hypnotism. Write for information. Bill Donnelly, 312 McClellan, Wausau, Wisc. . . . I want to start recorded voice correspondence with anyone who has a tape recorder operating at a speed close to 3.5 or 3.6 inches per second with two-track 6.350 mm (.25 inch) tape. Must be an "A" winding machine (oxide coating of tape facing inside on reel). Bryan J. Ogburn, 1005 S. 7th St., Waco, Texas . . . For sale: WT, May & July '41; Doc Savage, Oct '35, Jan, Feb, Mar '36, June and Sept '37, Jan '43; good condition, considering age. 50c each, cash or P.O. Money Order. Lloyd Adams,

935 Buffalo St, Olean, N.Y. . . . Would like back issues of aSF, but can't pay anything. Wm. J. Doherty, Jr., 23 Florence St., Cambridge 38, Mass. . . . Want cloth-bound copies in very good condition of *CRUX ANSATA*, by H. G. Wells and *BUTTER & JAM*, by Francois leDubonette. Joe R. Rhoden, Jr., P.O. Box 188, Itasca, Ill. . . . Am putting out a fanzine called *HUMORISTF* and need material—short stories, articles, cartoons, etc. Let's hear from you talented fans who don't usually send material to fanzines. Will be 15-20 pages, 10c copy. Gregg Calkins, 930 Briarcliff Ave., Salt Lake City 16, Utah . . . My letters to Shelby Vick have been coming back marked "unclaimed", so will someone please send me his present address? Orville W. Mosher, 1728 Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas . . . Will trade fantasy and stf books in very good to mint condition, all have d-ws—*SOME TIME NEVER*, Roald Dahl for *SEETEE SHIP*, Will Stewart; *NIGHT OF THE JABBERWOCK*, Fredric Brown for *SEETEE SHOCK*, Will Stewart; *SHADOW ON THE HEARTH*, Judith Merrill for *THE COMETEERS*, Jack Williamson; *MISTRESS MASHAM'S REPOSE*, T. H. White for *THE LEGION OF SPACE*, Williamson; *THE FLYING SAUCER*, Bernard Newman for *THE KID FROM MARS*, Oscar J. Friend; *THE YOUNG EMPEROR*, Robert Payne for *THE*

GREEN HILLS OF EARTH, Heinlein; *THE GULF OF TIME*, Robert Standish for *THE CARNELIAN CUBE*, Pratt & deCamp. Must be in good condition and have d-ws. Regis Murphy, 932 Lanterman Ave, Youngstown 1, Ohio . . . Attention Indiana fans. Join the Indiana Science-Fantasy Association. For information write (Miss) Lee Trempor, 1022 N. Tuxedo Street, Indianapolis 1, Ind. This club is for any fan who lives in, has lived in, or has ever set foot in Indiana . . . *INDIANA FANTASY*, 30 page mimeographed fanzine featuring authors David H. Keller, James R. Adams and Ray Beam, now available. Quarterly, 20c copy or 3 for 50c. Editor, Lee Trempor, address given above . . . Lee would also like to buy back issues of sfantasy mags, especially those featuring Ray Bradbury and the Northwest Smith series by C. L. Moore . . . Are there any fans between the ages of 10 & 15 living in the Flushing area who would like to correspond with a lonely fan? I also have some aSFs (Sept & Oct '50 and Jan, Feb and Mar '51) which I will trade for back issues of OW. David MacDonald, 135-09 Jewel Ave, Flushing 67, N.Y. . . . Wanted: OW No. 1; pre-war Marvel before it folded; any issues of CF except Vol 2 No. 1, Vol 3 No. 3, Vol 6 No. 1; back issues of AS; FA, particularly Vol 1 and Aug '42, Oct '40 & Apr '44. Howard

Browne's "The Return of Tharn" and the 2nd installment of "Warrior of the Dawn"; all other mags such as TWS, SS, etc. Fanzines, especially F-T for Jan. Feb, Mar & Apr '51; all issues, including extras. Fancient, all issues. All parts of the Immortal Storm. Tarzan Comic books, all issues. Planet Comics. Henry Moskowitz, Three Bridges, N.J. . . . Bob Chessser and Ronald Smith are starting a fanzine and need stories, articles and illustrations. Also, any pointers from experienced fanzine publishers will be appreciated. Subscription orders will be taken now, but do not send any money until you receive the first copy. Ronald L. Smith, 332 E. Date, Oxnard, Calif. . . . Wanted: Burroughs serials, "The Lad and the Lion" by E.R.B. O. A. Kline serials or novels R. M. Farley's "Radio Man" and "Radio Beasts" and R. M.F. serials from Argosy. "Warrior of the Dawn" by H. Browne in book or mag form. For sale or trade: "Tarzan Triumphant" with d-w; British editions of "The Return of Tarzan", "The Beasts of Tarzan", and "Tarzan and the Foreign Legion", the latter two mint with d-w. Also have "Tarzan og Opars Juveler" (Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar) published in Denmark. Will sell these to the highest bidder or trade for above listed wants. Send postcard to Charles Nuetzel, 16452 Moorpark St, Encino, Calif. . . .

FUN WITH SCIENCE

MATHEMATICS is an *exact* science. Take the number 5 for instance. Let's assume we were trying to explain it to some strange guy from Mars . . . He starts the conversation. He says: "How smart are you? Tell me one thing you know for sure." So we say: "Well, I know five things are five, for sure." And to show him we know, we write down 5. But he grins and says we are nuts. He says: "You've only put down one mark. Actually it should be expressed this way:" and he writes - - + - - . Before we can protest (as if we could!) he says: "Heck, I'm a liar myself, because I should have written: five." We stare at the word. "And again, I lie. I should not have written it, but uttered it." By this time we are getting a little sorry we went to Mars. But he goes on apologetically. "No, forgive me, I should have uttered five utterances!" "But all of these are five," we scream at him. He looks down on us from his superior height and knowledge. "Then you are speaking of something quite general, and not exact at all. How can you be so flibberty-gibbity?"

"Look," say we, exasperated, grabbing the pencil from him. Quickly

we draw him a sketch of our house. "That's my home, where I live," we say. "*That* we know for sure!" Let him fumble around making something *else* out of a *picture*! But he doesn't. He merely laughs. "You lie. That is not your house, but a representation of it." We howl at him: "But you know darn well what we *meant*!" "So sorry," says he, "We Martians are not mind readers, nor are we very smart. Things must be made very *exact* before we understand them."

We try once more. "Ever hear of the law of gravitation?" "I'm afraid not," he says. "Please explain." "Well, gravitation is that force that causes an apple to fall to the ground!" "Ah," says he. "It is a two-way law!" "Two way?" we ask, frowning. "Sure. In the spring the tree blossoms, the sap goes up, and out of the earth an apple is finally formed. And of course, since it goes up, it comes down—and all by law! How wonderful!" "You sap!" we scream, "That's a different law. That's the . . . law of nature!" "Very peculiar," he remarks. "One law to pull one way, and another to pull the other way. You must have an awful lot of laws." "A few,"

we admit. "But the law of nature is varied. Certain combinations under certain conditions give the same result. That is what we call a law." He looked puzzled finally, and we grinned triumphantly. "If a thing does a thing, and of its own accord, then it is alive and intelligent. It requires no law. And if it doesn't do it of itself, it is not the doer, but the instrument. And that implies that someone else does it. How then can a law do anything, as it is a dead thing? The dead do nothing!"

You just can't explain anything to a Martian!

But it looks like the scientists are in the same boat—they can't explain anything to *us*. Take for instance, some years ago physicians were telling us you can't live without meat! Actually. To go on a vegetarian diet was suicide. Which of course accounts for the death of George Bernard Shaw . . .

And they used to tell us to take certain things to cure us of ills. Now they tell us the same thing is a poison. And what they used to call a poison, they now give us to cure us! History of science is an interesting pursuit. What was true and exact long ago is no longer true. And it follows that what is true and exact today will be false tomorrow. Even the precept of the atom. It explodes today because of fission and fusion. So the scientists tell us. But later on, somebody'll

make a discovery and it'll be because of something else. Wanna bet on it?

Like how far it is to the sun . . . They measure it by triangulation. All straight lines. But the Earth's atmosphere is spherical. It's like a gigantic lens. It magnifies everything we see out there. And it *bends* the light. Now they say light can't be bent, except at sharp angles, like when it's reflected or as in the case of air or water, refracted. We can see it bent at a sharp angle in water—but that's because the water has a definite surface, sharply defined. Not so with the atmosphere, they tell us. It just gets thinner and thinner until it doesn't exist at all. And they also tell us it goes out much further than the 600 miles they used to say it did. Now they say at least 18,000 miles (very rarefied, of course, so rarefied it would be like our most perfect laboratory vacuum). Anyway, since there is no definite line of demarcation, the light must be bent in a curve, not an angle. (Or is there a definite line of demarcation? Heavens, don't say that! You'll push all the past work on atmosphere into the ashcan!) To go on, if light *can* be bent, we have no assurance it comes straight from the sun all the way! Maybe it bends all the time! And if it does, we aren't 93,000,000 miles from the sun in a straight line. That atmospheric lens mixes everything up! And golly, if that's true, then the speed of light

is slower than they say!

How many stars would we see if we got out beyond this magnifying effect of the atmosphere? Less, maybe none! So the concept that we'd see *more* isn't logical after all! Why didn't we realize this before? Maybe we wouldn't see the moon either, if it weren't for the atmosphere? And

maybe the sun wouldn't be half as bright. And maybe the light doesn't come from the sun at all, but is manufactured in our own atmosphere as a product of electro-magnetism.

We can hardly wait till the first space ship gets out there! It'll be quite a day for revision of scientific textbooks.

Science Fiction Book Reviews

It is a rare season indeed which brings forth such good new novels by these four top-notch writers of science-fictiondom: Robert A. Heinlein with a brand new "juvenile" in "Farmer in the Sky" (Scribners, New York. 216 p. Ill. \$2.50); Theodore Sturgeon with another completely new novel, "The Dreaming Jewels" (Greenberg, New York. 217 p. \$2.50); A. E. van Vogt with a loosely connected novel built around some of his best short stories, "The Voyage of the Space Beagle" (Simon Schuster, New York. 240 p. \$2.50); and Jack Williamson, under the alias of Will Stewart, with "See-tee Shock" (Simon & Schuster, New York. 238 p. \$2.50).

It is no news now that Heinlein's books for teen-age boys are as good as his adult fiction. Any reader who would pass them up because of their juvenile label is showing himself up as juvenile in his attitude toward good writing. Here is Heinlein's me-

ticulous attention to scientific detail developed as exhaustively as it has ever been in a story of the remaking of Jupiter's satellite, Ganymede, from a lump of ice and sterile rock into a habitable, farmable haven for refugees from an overcrowded Earth. Bill Lermer, his Boy Scout hero, has the kind of maturity for his



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years which our own ancestors had when they carved an American nation out of wilderness (read some tombstone dates some time: they lived and died young), and which our own young people could and would show if our culture permitted. With his father, his stepmother and step-sister, and with the kind of good neighbors who are essential to the success of any colonial enterprise, Bill struggles through against bureaucracy, politics, and tidal disaster. There is a brief and quite unnecessary suggestion of an alien race near the end—perhaps we will meet its descendents in future books as young mankind pushes out into the Galaxy.

Where the Heinlein book is the best of old-line mechanistic science fiction, Ted Sturgeon's "The Dreaming Jewels" is a three-way hybrid of science fiction, fantasy, and plain good fiction. Its people, particularly the carnival folk with whom eight-year-old Horty Bluett finds refuge from a brutal foster-father, are real and warm and one cares what happens to them, not as pawns in a chess-game of intricate plotting but as beings in their own right. This is particularly true of Zena, the midget woman whose understanding of Horty's real nature enables her to hide him until his extra-human powers have grown great enough to protect him from "the Maneater," Pierre Manetre, scientist-proprietor of the carnival who has devoted a lifetime to the quest for power over the

dreaming jewels from outer space. How these extra-terrestrial gems, whose dreams take solid form as plants, animals, and men, are related to Horty and Zena, to his childhood sweetheart Kay Hallowell, and to his foster-father, Judge Bluett, is the theme of the story. The author has drawn on rich personal experience to make the carnival folk come to life, and on sheer writing ability to weave the thread of fantasy through their fates.

Although the book is built up from two of his best long stories, "Black Destroyer" and "Discord in Scarlet," with a third episode taken from Vol I, #4, OTHER WORLDS ("War of Nerves"), A. E. van Vogt has been less successful than Heinlein or Sturgeon in giving "The Voyage of the Space Beagle" the unity which a novel needs and which such books as "The World of A" and "Slan" have had. In effect the book deals with four adventures of the crew of the *Beagle*, outward bound from our galaxy to the Andromeda universe, with potent and hostile members of alien races: the cat-like Coeurl with its ravening hunger for potassium, the hypnotic Riim, the red devil Ixtl with its hideous drive, and the final space-devouring Anabis of the Andromeda system. A unifying character and theme have been added to the original stories in the person of Elliott Grosvenor, a Milquetoast of a scientist who represents the new discipline of Nexial-

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ism—the science of things as a whole—and his struggle for recognition against the domineering chemist, Kent. Nexialism is akin to the Null A philosophy of van Vogt's first book in the series, but it is never as clearly developed either as a concept or as an integral part of the plot-framework.

Jack Williamson, as "Will Stewart," has also been less successful with "Seetee Shock" than he was in his own right with "The Humanoids," its predecessor in the Simon and Schuster science fiction library. The story gets off to a slow and tor-

tured start from which it never really recovers. Briefly it is the story of Nick Jenkins, engineer on a secret project to use seetee—contraterrene—matter as a source of boundless energy which he believes will destroy the causes of war among the peoples of the solar system. "Murdered" by a seetee bomb, he sets out to unravel the plot which has led to the attack on the laboratories and to find his own killers before the deadly radiation sickness, seetee shock, destroys mind and body. The twisted values and motivations of Martin Brand, Nick's uncle and originator of the Fifth Freedom—free power, are reminiscent of the ending of "The Humanoids." S&S, by the way, are turning to an unreasonably cheap binding to keep their prices down in this series.

Four books—four science fiction aces which would take most tricks in an average game, but two of which would be trumped by their own authors' previous novels.

P. SCHUYLER MILLER

*The People Who Make***OTHER WORLDS**

HANNES BOK

by

Darrell C. Richardson

BACK in 1939, Ray Bradbury, now a famous writer, but then just a fan, attended the First World Science Fiction Convention in New York. Under his arm, he

carried a portfolio of sample drawings of his friend, Hannes Bok—now a famous artist, but then just a fan, too. Bok had done several illustrations for Bradbury's amateur fan-zine, *FUTURE FANTASIA*. Among the many people who saw these drawings by Bok was Farns-

worth Wright, veteran editor of *WEIRD TALES*. He liked the work so well that he asked Bok to do some illustrations for him. This is the way, according to Bok, that Ray Bradbury helped launch his career in the pulp-fantasy field.

While doing art work for *WEIRD TALES*, Bok became a close friend of Farnsworth Wright. After Wright's death, *WEIRD TALES* went bi-monthly, and Bok turned to other magazines in the field.

Bok admits to having been born in Kansas City, Missouri, but refuses to tell his birth date because:

(1) He's a dabbler in astrology, and realizes what giving one's birth-data can lead to, and (2) He finds that if his age is not known for certain, he cannot be pinned down to any special age-group behavior. His white hair entitles him to speak with authority to other oldsters and his stamina and limberness permit him to keep up with teen-agers.

Bok is extremely reticent about his private life, because he says, "It isn't private anymore if you make it public, now is it?" This policy of letting his art work speak for him, instead of revealing intimate details about his private life, has given rise to many peculiar legends. Bok is thought by many to be an eccentric person who demonstrates the so-called peculiarities of a tormented genius. As a matter of fact, Bok is a very handsome fellow with a friendly and pleasing personality. However, he doesn't say much about

his private life even to his friends. I have admired Bok's works for years, own several of his originals, and corresponded with him at length. I count him a personal friend, and he has even visited in my home in Kentucky. But he still will not do too much talking about himself. His premature white hair along with his tanned youthful face make it most difficult to judge his age. Bok refuses even to tell his nationality; he says flatly, "I'm an American. My folks were here before 1700, so what does it matter what their forbears were?"

Bok became interested in fantasy and art at an early age. In his own words, "At the age of twelve I was given a copy of *AMAZING STORIES* containing the third installment of Merritt's classic yarn, 'The Moon Pool.' The illustration by Frank R. Paul made me decide to be an artist. Don't know why, except that I liked it. And I *believed* the 'Moon Pool' tale! It *seemed* to be true . . . and ever since, like Larry O'Keefe, I've believed in fairies and leprechauns." Merritt's writings caused young Bok to begin reading and collecting fantasy. This eventually brought him into the professional field of fantasy and science fiction.

Aside from two years of "art" in high school, Bok has had no formal artistic training. Naturally, he has acquired a tremendous amount of information and knowledge of art in his years of private study and professional experience. However,

he never learned the technical shortcuts which would have come from attending a good art school. "Consequently," he says, "it takes me ages to perform what the average school-trained artist can knock out overnight. I know how to paint, but drawing—oh, brother!"

It might be interesting to know how Bok goes about illustrating a story. On receiving an assignment, he reads the story four or five times, selects the scene most typical of the story and goes insane for a few days, thinking up various "treatments" of his idea. He believes simply that a good illustration should make the reader desire to read the story, rather than provide a diagram of the story action. Therefore, he tries to portray the story's mood rather than its incidents.

In an article published in Donald Day's *THE FANSCIENT* Bok says, "To me, a good illustration is something which catches the prospective reader's eye. It arouses an emotion in him, generally wonder plus something else—maybe horror, maybe pleasure . . . maybe anyone of a hundred things. If it's plain unadulterated illustration, he is forced to read the story to see what the picture is all about. If it is illustration, but simultaneously good art, he will want to read the story—in the hope that it will do the same things to him that the picture has done. I believe that an illustration should suggest the mood and

the events of the story, thereby acting much the same as the *blurb* following the title of the story."

Bok prefers a *tight* technique, since it presents the fantastic subject matter in a concrete and plausible form. But he shuns the "copied-from-photographs" habit of many illustrators. "Copying from a photograph isn't drawing," he says. "If I wanted real-life people, I'd not draw them, I'd photograph them. What I try to put into my figures is an interpretation—the portrayal of types rather than common ordinary people to be seen every day everywhere. What's fantastic about the commonplace?"

But getting back to Bok's ideas about *tight* technique, he explains in his own colorful style, "For my money, fantasy art simply has got to be *tight*. A sketch is a very nice thing, an impression. But a sketch isn't convincing. Not, anyway, when it tries to depict something that never existed. A sketch of a dragon is interesting, but it won't convince you that dragons exist. But a *tight*, photographic painting of a dragon, with every scale in place, and dirt showing in between the scales, and some of the scales chipped or broken off, and some worn dull by being dragged over rough ground—none of which could be shown in a sketch; such a *tight*, photographic painting convinces you that maybe dragons do exist—because the thing looks so real. And so I try, in my painting, to 'make kodachromes of

the impossible.' I'm trying to arouse the emotion that the things depicted actually exist somewhere. And I sincerely believe that what I'm making is Fine Art."

Having once settled on what he's going to draw and how, Bok slaves away with a pencil until he has achieved a suitable pattern. By this time the paper is black from erasures and smearing, so he traces the pattern to a clean sheet of paper and pencils it. The actual pencilling doesn't take long at all, being automatic. The real work is in thinking-the-picture-out. This is one reason why Bok dislikes to submit a "rough" to an editor. He finds it just about as easy or as difficult, (depending on how you look at it) to do the "rough" as it is to do the finished picture. Bok says, "After the 'roughs' are finally altered to suit the client, it's almost impossible to instill any spontaneity and design."

Bok has no regular working hours. He works whenever he can. When really interested in a job, he can't put it down and keeps going twelve to sixteen hours at a stretch. Then he may not work again for several days. Often he begins work at 10:00 P.M. and grinds it out until the sun rises. (It is quieter in New York at night). Bok keeps a P. O. mailing address in order to keep enthusiasts from dropping in on him uninvited and wrecking his schedule.

Bok works in practically all techniques except pastels. He prefers

pencilwork, gouache, transparent oil glazes and water color. He works less with pen-and-ink, charcoal, batik and opaque oil colors. It all depends on the picture he's making—what would look good in one technique might not look equally good in another. Bok has done some lithographs and he has also tried his hand at being a sculptor.

Morris Scott Dollens writing in *FANTASY ADVERTISER* describes one of the outstanding qualities of Bok's work: "I have always admired the strong high-lighting effect of Bok's work which has an air of solidity; even though the subjects depicted are often quite fantastic, there is almost a feeling that the objects can be touched with the hands."

Personally, this technique of Bok makes me feel that his animals and figures possess a three-dimensional quality which is most appealing.

Among his fellow-artists, he likes Edd Cartier both as a friend and as an artist. He likes Cartier's marvelous use of anatomy and his minimum of modelling. Another artist he admires is Calle. He once called Virgil Finlay "the best pen-and-ink technician who ever lived." J. Allen St. John has always been one of his favorites. However, his likes are few compared to his dislikes. Naming no names, Bok shudders at much of the work in current magazines which he considers devoid of imagination, esthetic qualities, and draftsmanship.

"If art work typifies the reading-matter—and it's supposed to," he sighs, "then most of the stories now in print are, judging by the accompanying illustrations, sheer junk. If I were a parent, I wouldn't allow my kids to bring such stuff into the house."

As for his favorite illustrations, Bok likes best of all his drawings for "THE BLACK WHEEL," which was an unfinished Merritt book completed by Bok. He considers these pure "mood pictures." As for cover paintings he likes the ones for "THE HORROR IN THE GLEN" for *WEIRD TALES* (because the editor let him run riot with color), "THE SOUL STEALERS" for *IMAGINATION* (though it reproduced hideously), the "blue lunar cover" for August 1951 *MARVEL SCIENCE FICTION* (because he much prefers doing landscape whenever possible) and "POGO PLANET" for *FUTURE FICTION* (because it was such a whacky idea). Two of his very finest paintings were done for *OTHER WORLDS* (November 1950, and May 1951).

Bok is also a writer, but will not name a favorite among the several stories he has sold. He replies, "My pet story is always the one I'm *going* to write next." One of the better long pieces Bok has done, in my opinion, is "THE BLUE FLAMINGO" for *STARTLING STORIES*. He also performed the monumental task of finishing two

of A. Merritt's unfinished books "THE FOX WOMAN" and "THE BLACK WHEEL."

Bok does not collect fantasy and science fiction extensively, but, he does keep most of M. P. Shiels', A. Merritts', and Kenneth Grahame's titles on hand. His favorite escape reading is adventure stuff by Beatrice Grimshaw, Achmed Abdullah, and Talbot Mundy, along with books by Anne Parrish, W. H. Hudson, Stephen Leacock, Joan Grant, and Gerald Kersh.

Another of Bok's hobbies is the collecting of symphonic records. He does not collect them for the "greatness" of the music, but with an ear for novelty, brilliancy of orchestral color, hummable tunes and emotional impact. He is also a film addict and will go to see any picture in technicolor, which he fondly calls "hecticolor."

Bok likes to do his thinking while on the prowl, and loves to slink about in out-of-the-way places—looking like a shady character intent on some dire adventure. He dearly loves to eat, and especially likes sweets. He carries on a staggering correspondence (like the late H. P. Lovecraft) with people he will probably never meet, but "who are interesting even by mail." He loathes mobs and parties and whoever can lure Bok out to a fan-meeting deserves a medal!

Bok has potential possibilities far above most of the other artists in the fantasy field. I believe he could

one day be one of the great artists of our time. I have often wondered why he stays with the fantasy field, especially when there are times as a free-lance illustrator when he has to even miss a few meals. Let Bok answer this in his own words, "Why do I stick to fantasy art, when it doesn't keep me decently supplied with the necessities of life? Well, for one thing, there's a lot more variety in it than in other fields of illustration. One week you're drawing Martians, next week you're doing lunar expeditions, and the week after that you're showing a dryad emerging from a tree. Straight advertising art pays more, but what a bore! Fantasy illustration demands variety, so I stick to it. And since some editors don't dictate how to draw an illustration, I can oftentimes throw in a lot of *quality* that I could never get away with in advertising art. Several times I have passed off pure abstractions as illustrations!"

Back in 1940, Bok wrote in a *fan-zine*, BIZARRE, "My theory about creative art is that pay doesn't count so much as turning out good work. I wish one could do the latter and still get paid well for it. Seems funny the relatively bad stuff pays best!"

For a time, Bok worked with Associated American Artists Galleries, doing sundry medical-magazine covers and other work for them. He also did a lithograph for them called "LAZY AFTERNOON",

which I believe to be as good as anything he has ever done. Bok has a swell idea for another lithograph which he would call "THE ROAD TO THE CHAPEL" (plug: If enough fans write into Associated American Artists asking for another Bok lithograph, they will probably ask him to do another one).

Bok had a one-man exhibition at a New York Gallery in 1945, and some of his lithographs have been exhibited at the Library of Congress. He hopes eventually to move into the field of philosophic and metaphysical art, and like "shadows cast before," his studio is hung with numerous Madonnas, "phobic portraits," "symbolic messages," and with a few burlesques on the side for comic relief.

Bok has done a considerable amount of book illustrating—jackets as well as interior illustrations. Some of his better work has been done for Arkham House, Fantasy Press, Shasta, and Prime Press. His work for Robert E. Howard's "SKULL FACE AND OTHERS" and Hall and Flints' "THE BLIND SPOT" is typical of his unique and "other-worldly" style.

Hannes Bok might very well sum up his philosophy toward his work in his own words, "I like to make pictures showing things not as they are—which we all know too well—but pictures of things as they might be, and could be. And maybe by doing so, I can convince people to start working toward them."

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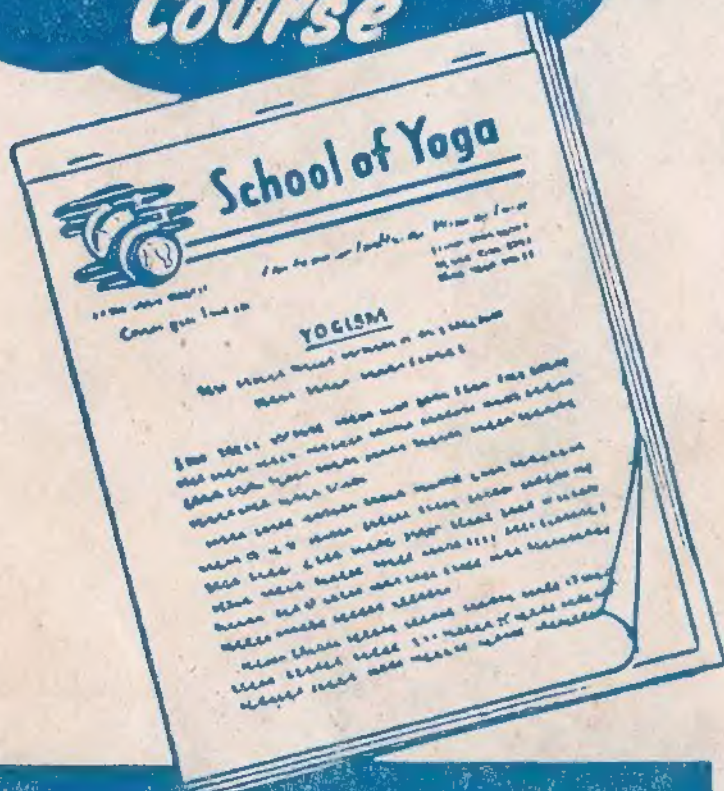
HANNES BOK, well-known fantasy and science fiction artist is one of the most popular contributors to OTHER WORLDS as well as to a great many of the other magazines in the field of imaginative fiction. It was his art work which helped launch our one-time sister magazine *Imagination*, and which has proved enormously popular in our own previous issues. You will see much more of his work as he helps make our magazine more decorative with his distinctive style. (A full-length article about him appears in this issue.) The drawing below is used with special permission of the *Cincinnati Fantasy Group*.



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